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Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)

Reporting period from 9 March to 21 June 2017

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) since my report of 8 March 2017 (S/2017/201). During the reporting period, the situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained generally calm. On the political front, following considerable delay, agreement on a new electoral law was reached in Lebanon, with parliamentary elections to be held in May 2018. Meanwhile, the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to place a heavy burden on Lebanon, with 1,011,366 Syrian refugees registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as at 20 June 2017.

II. Implementation of resolution 1701 (2006)

A. Situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

2. The environment in the UNIFIL area of operations remained stable overall, but heightened rhetoric by both parties led to some anxiety among the local population. The United Nations continued to urge both parties to refrain from potentially inflammatory comments, including through intensified UNIFIL engagement with local leaders and communities in its area of operations. Commemorations of Palestinian Nakba Day, on 29 April 2017, and "Liberation and Resistance Day", on 25 May, were held in the area of operations without incident.

3. On 20 April 2017, Hizbullah conducted a tour for Lebanese and international media in part of Sector West of the UNIFIL area of operations, including along sections of the Blue Line. The Lebanese Armed Forces notified UNIFIL less than an hour before the media tour started, stating that Lebanese Armed Forces personnel would be on the ground. The notification did not include reference to any Hizbullah involvement. UNIFIL saw the media group on three occasions and encountered it twice in different locations, including close to the Blue Line. As a UNIFIL patrol attempted to stop the convoy, a senior representative from the Lebanese Armed

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Forces insisted that the group be permitted to pass, given that the tour had been approved. Another UNIFIL patrol, which was providing security for the ongoing tripartite meeting, stopped the convoy from moving closer to the United Nations position in Ra's al-Naqurah.

4. While UNIFIL personnel did not observe unauthorized armed personnel when they encountered the media group, a UNIFIL investigation, based on reliable media reports and information gathered, found it credible that unauthorized personnel and weapons had been present in the area of operations during the event, most likely as part of a staged display of combatants in an orange grove, at a point on the road between Naqurah and Alma al-Sha'b (approximately 5.5 km from the Blue Line). The presence of such unauthorized personnel and weapons constituted a violation of resolution 1701 (2006).

5. The incident prompted an immediate reaction from the Government of Lebanon. The Prime Minister of Lebanon, Saad Hariri, accompanied by the Minister of Defence, Yacoub Sarraf, the Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces, General Joseph Aoun, and senior Lebanese Armed Forces officers, visited the Blue Line the next day, demonstrating the Government's commitment to resolution 1701 (2006). At UNIFIL headquarters, the Prime Minister expressed appreciation to UNIFIL and to the troop-contributing countries. He stressed the importance of moving towards a permanent ceasefire. My Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the UNIFIL Force Commander welcomed the visit.

6. Separately, UNIFIL observed civilians carrying unauthorized weapons, the majority of which were hunting weapons, mostly in Sector East. The overall number of armed hunters decreased during the reporting period. UNIFIL once observed individuals carrying assault rifles and handguns. On one occasion, in the vicinity of Naqurah, civilians fired shots in the air out of their car while passing in front of a UNIFIL vehicle. UNIFIL observed, on several occasions, the presence or firing of small arms, including during weddings and funerals. In all cases, UNIFIL informed the Lebanese Armed Forces of the violations.

7. Apart from the substantiated reports mentioned in paragraph 3 to 5 above, during the reporting period, UNIFIL did not receive specific information nor did it find evidence of armed personnel, weapons or infrastructure either being present in or being transferred into its area of operations. The Israel Defense Forces continued to allege that Hizbullah maintains military infrastructure and equipment in southern Lebanon. UNIFIL monitors the area of operations and the Blue Line and reports all violations of resolution 1701 (2006) that it observes, including the presence of unauthorized armed personnel or weapons. In accordance with its mandate, UNIFIL does not proactively search private property for weapons in the south unless there is credible evidence of a violation of resolution 1701 (2006), including an imminent threat of hostile activity from that location. Where specific information is received regarding the illegal presence of armed personnel, weapons or infrastructure inside its area of operations, UNIFIL, in cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces, remains determined to act with all means available within its mandate and capabilities. The Lebanese Armed Forces command continued to confirm that it would act immediately to put an end to any illegal activity in contravention of resolution 1701 (2006) and relevant Government decisions.

8. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and Lebanese sovereignty. UNIFIL observed an increase in the number and duration of such violations. On 22 May 2017, an Israeli unmanned aerial vehicle crashed north of the Blue Line in the Ayta al-Sha'b area (Sector West). UNIFIL protested all air violations to the Israel Defense Forces and

called upon the Government of Israel to stop them immediately. The Government of Lebanon also protested the air violations to UNIFIL.

9. The Israeli occupation of northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line continued, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and Lebanese sovereignty. To date, Israel has not provided a response to the proposal submitted by UNIFIL to both parties in 2011 aimed at facilitating the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from the occupied area. The Lebanese Armed Forces informed UNIFIL, in July 2011, of Lebanon's agreement to the proposal.

10. Ground violations of the Blue Line occurred mostly as a result of Lebanese shepherds with their flocks crossing the Blue Line in the areas of Bastrah, Kfar Shuba and Shab'a Farms (Sector East), as well as Rumaysh (Sector West). On several occasions in April and May 2017, Lebanese workers removing sand with excavators and trucks violated the Blue Line in the vicinity of Kfar Kila (Sector East). On two occasions, civilians who crossed south of the Blue Line were apprehended by the Israel Defense Forces and subsequently returned. On 1 March, a woman of non-Lebanese nationality crossed south of the Blue Line in the vicinity of Shab'a Farms, claiming that she had lost her way. Israel Defense Forces personnel returned her north of the Blue Line shortly afterwards, where she was taken into custody by the Lebanese Armed Forces. On 27 April, a Lebanese man crossed south of the Blue Line near Kfar Kila and was reportedly apprehended by the Israel Defense Forces in Kiryat Shmona. The following day, the Israel Defense Forces transferred him to UNIFIL at Ra's al-Naqurah; UNIFIL, in turn, handed him over to the Lebanese Armed Forces.

11. Tensions rose intermittently in some areas along the Blue Line owing to activities or work in close proximity to the Line. UNIFIL undertook extensive liaison and coordination efforts with the parties to ensure calm and de-escalate tensions. On three occasions, UNIFIL also observed Israel Defense Forces soldiers pointing their weapons across the Blue Line at individuals in civilian clothes taking photographs of an Israel Defense Forces position east of Houla. On another occasion, an Israel Defense Forces soldier threw rocks towards people north of the Blue Line. From 7 to 10 April 2017, workers cleaned the Wazzani riverbed in the area of the Lebanese resorts (Sector East) along the Blue Line. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces maintained a monitoring presence during the cleaning. UNIFIL also liaised closely with the Israel Defense Forces to ensure calm in the area. On 26 April, tensions increased in the eastern part of the UNIFIL area of operations as a result of the Israel Defense Forces resuming excavation work in the Shab'a Farms area south of the Blue Line. The UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander requested the Israel Defense Forces to suspend the work and to agree on a way forward using the tripartite forum, in view of the sensitive nature of the area and the potential that an incident across the Blue Line could lead to an escalation.

12. The freedom of movement of UNIFIL was respected, with some isolated exceptions. Only a marginal number of incidents of unfriendly behaviour against UNIFIL took place, including stone-throwing and damage to UNIFIL vehicles. On 10 March 2017, UNIFIL observed that three of its basic temporary observation posts in the vicinity of Blida had been pulled down. On each occasion, UNIFIL immediately engaged the Lebanese Armed Forces to help calm the situation and investigate the circumstances to prevent recurrence. On two separate occasions, Israel Defense Forces tanks tracked the UNIFIL Liaison Branch and Observer Group Lebanon personnel and positioned the cannon in the direction of United Nations personnel. UNIFIL addressed the matter through its liaison channels with the Israel Defense Forces.

13. Relations between UNIFIL and the local population remained largely positive. UNIFIL public engagements provided opportunities to clarify its operational practices and requirements and address the concerns of local communities. In line with the recommendations of the UNIFIL strategic review, UNIFIL explored with the Lebanese Armed Forces ways to expand capacity for civil-military cooperation and collaborative efforts on the ground, including through the establishment of a Lebanese Armed Forces regional centre for civil-military cooperation in southern Lebanon.

14. UNIFIL continued to implement quick-impact projects focused on supporting the extension of State authority and meeting the critical needs of the local communities, thereby complementing the wider United Nations humanitarian and development presence in southern Lebanon, in line with the United Nations strategic framework for Lebanon (2017-2020). UNIFIL contingents, using their own resources as part of civil-military cooperation efforts, continued to provide medical, dental and veterinary assistance to communities. UNIFIL also continued regular training courses for municipal police and civil defence volunteers in firefighting tactics and rescue missions to enhance local capacity and support community resilience. In March 2017, the Minister of State for Women visited southern Lebanon to mark the Open Day on Women, Peace and Security. Twenty elected women members of municipal councils received training from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and non-governmental organization (NGO) experts in municipal management.

15. UNIFIL conducted an average of over 13,500 operational activities per month, including vehicle and foot patrols, "market walks", checkpoints and observation tasks. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces jointly conducted approximately 17 per cent of UNIFIL operational activities, taking into consideration only those activities that could be conducted jointly with the Lebanese Armed Forces.

16. The Lebanese Armed Forces remained deployed with two reduced-strength brigades in the area south of the Litani River. The Lebanese Armed Forces maintained a reinforced presence in the northeastern part of the UNIFIL area of operations, including Shab'a village and the Arqub area.

17. While the Mission's threat and risk assessment remains unchanged and no imminent threat of physical violence against civilians was identified, Mission-wide planning efforts and training in the protection of civilians continued, including exercises with all relevant United Nations partners. Tailored training modules were developed for UNIFIL personnel on the specific requirements emanating from the Mission's protection of civilians mandate and to help to ensure a shared understanding of the UNIFIL protection of civilians strategy and implementation plan.

18. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force carried out maritime interdiction operations on a 24-hour basis and capacity building for the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy. During the reporting period (until 15 June 2017), the Maritime Task Force hailed 2,279 ships, of which 569 were inspected and cleared by the Lebanese authorities. Joint and coordinated exercises with UNIFIL, complemented by training courses covering a range of land and maritime operational issues, contributed to improved common operational standards between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces on land. In addition, the training courses resulted in Lebanese Armed Forces Navy units capable of conducting maritime surveillance and maritime interdiction operations that, in turn, enhanced cooperation with UNIFIL and its Maritime Task Force. Lebanese Armed Forces Navy personnel assumed command for maritime interdiction operations for limited periods of time, in close coordination and consultation with Maritime Task Force personnel. The Maritime Task Force

maintained a visible presence in the southern part of the area of maritime operations to prevent tensions between Israel and Lebanon. The Maritime Task Force does not have a mandate to monitor the line of buoys installed unilaterally by Israel, which is neither recognized by the Government of Lebanon nor by the United Nations. The Israel Defense Forces continued to carry out maintenance activities at the buoys, at times with divers. On several occasions, Israel Defense Forces patrol boats south of the line of buoys fired warning shots or flares and dropped explosive charges to turn away Lebanese fishing boats.

B. Security and liaison arrangements

19. The UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander intensified his regular bilateral engagements with Lebanese and Israeli authorities to maintain the relatively stable situation in areas north and south of the Blue Line. Those efforts were complemented with three tripartite meetings that were chaired and facilitated by UNIFIL. The parties strongly expressed their commitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), to respect the Blue Line and to maintain stability along and across the Line.

20. UNIFIL actively continued to use open channels established with both sides, in combination with a proactive deployment of its liaison component, military observers and units on the ground, to help to prevent violations of the Blue Line and build trust and confidence between the parties. As noted above, those measures were particularly important when tensions increased, including as a result of activities in the Wazzani River and Shab'a Farms areas.

21. In meetings of the tripartite forum, the parties engaged in substantive and constructive exchanges on issues pertaining to resolution 1701 (2006). The Israel Defense Forces expressed concern about their stated observation of an increase in Hizbullah activity and recurrent Blue Line violations in the vicinity of Mays al-Jabal and Kfar Kila, while noting a marked reduction in the number of armed hunters. The Lebanese Armed Forces protested the continuous Israeli air violations over all of Lebanon and the continued occupation of northern Ghajar by Israel, and raised concerns over incidents of weapons-pointing and over extensive monitoring of the Lebanese population in the south, including through electronic means, by the Israel Defense Forces.

22. During the reporting period, discussions were ongoing with the parties about points proposed for the marking of the Blue Line. In parallel, work continued on completing the construction and the refurbishing of other Blue Line markers.

23. To date, the establishment of a UNIFIL liaison office in Tel Aviv, Israel, is still pending.

24. The Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL continued to engage through the strategic dialogue process, which is an integral part of the capability development plan for the Lebanese Armed Forces, and continued to promote the role of international assistance in support of the Lebanese Armed Forces deployed in the UNIFIL area of operations. Pursuant to a request of the Prime Minister, consultations are also ongoing with the Government of Lebanon and the International Support Group for Lebanon to sustain and galvanize support from Member States to Lebanese security institutions.

25. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2305 (2016), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations completed a strategic review of UNIFIL, the recommendations of which were outlined in my letter dated 8 March 2017 to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/202). The review confirmed the need for

the continued good offices of my Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL, to preserve the cessation of hostilities and make progress towards a permanent ceasefire. Priorities identified included support to the efforts of the Government of Lebanon in increasing the capacity and presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon and in its territorial waters. The implementation of those recommendations is under way.

26. UNIFIL has conducted consultations with the Government of Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces on the possibility of establishing what the Lebanese Armed Forces now refers to as a "model Lebanese Armed Forces regiment" to cooperate closely with UNIFIL, in particular along the Blue Line. The Government has reconfirmed its commitment to increasing the presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the UNIFIL area of operations, including through such a regiment. On 21 April 2017, the Prime Minister emphasized that the Government was also committed to strengthening the Lebanese Navy with equipment and training in order to control its territorial waters and maritime border.

C. Disarming armed groups

27. The maintenance of arms outside the control of the State by Hizbullah and other groups continues to restrict the ability of Lebanon to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory. Illustrating the heightened rhetoric during the reporting period, in a televised speech on 11 May 2017, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah, stated that "any future confrontation could be inside the occupied Palestinian territories. There will be no place safe from the rockets of the resistance and the feet of the resistance fighters". On 30 March, the head of Hizbullah's parliamentary bloc, Mohammed Raad, publicly stated that "the Dimona reactor is one of the targets we have prepared for the enemy". On 30 April, a Hizbullah Member of Parliament, Nawaf al Moussawi, publicly stated that "we are capable of inflicting severe damage deep inside Israel, and our capabilities are increasing day by day to inflict this damage deep inside Israel". On 23 May, another Hizbullah Member of Parliament, Nawar al Sahli, publicly referred to Hizbullah's "force of arms, perseverance, science, the use of modern technology and development of weapons".

28. Several statements by Israeli representatives pertaining to the use of force against Lebanese targets were reported. Media sources quoted the Minister of Education and Diaspora Affairs of Israel, Naftali Bennett, as having stated that "Lebanese institutions, its infrastructure, airport, power stations, traffic junctions, Lebanese Army bases should all be legitimate targets if a war breaks out," with the result of "sending Lebanon back to the Middle Ages". The Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations strongly condemned those warnings in his statement to the Security Council on 20 April 2017. Media sources also reported the warning by Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff, General Gadi Eizenkot, that "in a future war, there will be a clear address: the state of Lebanon and the terror groups operating on its territory and under its authority," adding that any future confrontation would take place on Lebanese territory.

29. Against that backdrop, mutual accusations of violations of resolution 1701 (2006) by the parties continued. The Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed identical letters to me and the President of the Security Council, dated 25 April 2017 (S/2017/356), emphasizing that it was "extremely disturbing that armed Hezbollah militants feel free to move openly in the UNIFIL area of operation, without being challenged by UNIFIL or Lebanese Armed Forces personnel". In a previous letter to the Security Council, dated 13 March (S/2017/216), the Permanent Representative of Israel reiterated accusations that

Hizbullah's purported armed presence in southern Lebanon had been "actively encouraged" by the Government of Lebanon. The Permanent Representative of Lebanon, in identical letters to me and the President of the Security Council, dated 3 April (S/2017/295), transmitted comments from the Armed Forces Command of the Lebanese National Ministry of Defence to refute allegations pertaining to Hizbullah activity contained in the Israeli letter of 13 March (S/2017/216), called the allegations "mendacious and baseless". On 25 May, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Israel stated in the presence of the Security Council that Hizbullah had amassed over 100,000 missiles that were pointed at Israel, in violation of Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). In his letter dated 19 June (S/2017/523), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon denied the presence of armed fighters and weapons in villages in southern Lebanon, adding that Israel encroached on the daily lives, livelihoods and security of Lebanese civilians with "surveillance towers and listening devices all along the southern border". In a letter dated 20 June (S/2017/526), the Permanent Representative of Israel alleged that, over the past few months, Hizbullah had "established observation posts near the Blue Line" under the guise of an agricultural NGO.

30. On the issue of commitment to resolution 1701 (2006), on 16 March 2017, the Government of Lebanon, in a letter addressed to me and the President of the Security Council (S/2017/228), reiterated that it had "implemented all the provisions of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)", while denouncing what it considered to be threatening Israeli rhetoric. On 21 March, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon, Gebran Bassil, publicly stated that there was agreement among the Lebanese on the need for "resistance against Israel". On the same day, Prime Minister Hariri told Egyptian media that he continued to oppose weapons outside the control of state institutions. Both Foreign Minister Bassil and Prime Minister Hariri referred to a national defence strategy, yet to be developed, as the framework to address the issue of Hizbullah weapons.

31. Since my last report, the Lebanese Armed Forces and security forces have arrested a considerable number of individuals suspected of affiliation with extremist groups or involvement in terrorist activities throughout Lebanon, with 127 terrorism-related arrests since 1 March 2017. Arrests included those of alleged recruiters, weapons suppliers and financiers for Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Jabhat Fath al-Sham (formerly known as Nusrah Front). Weapons caches and illegal arms dealerships were uncovered on several occasions.

32. There was no progress in dismantling the military bases maintained by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada, which continue to compromise Lebanese sovereignty and impede the ability of the State to monitor and effectively control parts of the border.

33. The security situation in the majority of Palestine refugee camps in Lebanon remained generally stable, although violence in Ein el Helweh between extremist groups and the joint Palestinian security forces remains of serious concern. Between 7 and 12 April 2017, intense clashes over several days resulted in 12 people being killed and 44 injured, the displacement of several hundred families and extensive physical damage to camp infrastructure. Basic service delivery in the camp by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had to be briefly suspended. Extremist groups remain present in Ein el Helweh amid concern regarding possible linkages between radical groups in the camps and terrorist cells outside the camps. The Lebanese Armed Forces and security forces intervened on several occasions to thwart suspected joint plots. The construction of a security perimeter around the Ein El Helweh camp continued. Intermittent incidents of violence also occurred in Beddawi, Burj al-Barajinah and Shatila.

D. Arms embargo and border control

34. Regular reports of alleged arms transfers to Hizbullah remain of serious concern. In his letter of 25 April 2017 (S/2017/356), the Permanent Representative of Israel alleged that "Hizbullah has been building up its arsenal" by smuggling weapons from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon and was assembling "military infrastructure in the towns and villages of southern Lebanon". The Permanent Representative also cited publications according to which Hizbullah had utilized weapons production factories built by Iran on Lebanese territory. The United Nations takes such allegations seriously, but is not in a position to substantiate those allegations independently.

35. Since my last report, there have been sporadic incidents of cross-border fire from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon. The situation along the border remained tense as the Lebanese Armed Forces stepped up efforts against militant threats, in particular in the outskirts of Arsal, where the presence of extremist groups remains of concern. Robust operations were carried out on 22 and 24 April 2017, in the Arsal, Qa' and R'as Ba'albak areas, among others, resulting in the death and arrest of a number of militants. Heavy clashes were also reported between militants, including ISIL, Jabhat Fath al-Sham and Saraya Ahl al-Sham. Hizbullah also reportedly remained engaged in efforts to prevent the infiltration of militants from the Syrian side of Lebanon's eastern border, as stated by Hizbullah Secretary-General Nasrallah on 11 May. A number of Lebanese nationals were also alleged to have participated in fighting with non-State armed groups in the Syrian Arab Republic.

36. On 10 June 2017, following what appears to have been an agreement between non-State armed groups, a group of refugee families from Arsal was escorted by the Lebanese Armed Forces to the Syrian border to resettle in Assal al-Ward, Syria. Neither the Government of Lebanon nor the United Nations were associated with that relocation. UNHCR, in accordance with its mandate, is compiling data on all refugee families in Lebanon originating from the area in order to assess their intentions.

E. Landmines and cluster bombs

37. The Lebanese Armed Forces, through the Lebanese Mine Action Centre, continues to clear lands contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance, mostly remnants from the July 2006 war. Around 76 per cent of contaminated Lebanese lands have been cleared thus far, although incidents continue to occur. On 31 May 2017, one youth was reportedly injured by a landmine in the vicinity of Yarun (Sector West). On 3 May, my Special Coordinator and the Ambassador of the European Union to Lebanon visited a demining site to stress the importance of continued progress in order to reduce potential harm to the safety and security of all and as an important factor for economic regeneration, especially in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed Forces is operating with half the capacity needed to implement its action plan owing to a lack of financial resources and limited donor funding for demining activities. Through a Mines Advisory Group project funded by the OCHA Lebanon Humanitarian Fund, the Lebanese Armed Forces has initiated demining activities close to Syrian refugee settlements in the Biqa' governorate.

38. Mine clearance and explosive ordnance disposal continued also in the UNIFIL area of operations, with the clearing 163 m^2 of land. The United Nations Mine Action Service conducted quality assurance visits, training and safety monitoring for UNIFIL troop-contributing country demining teams. Safety training and

awareness briefings with respect to landmines and explosive remnants of war were provided to United Nations personnel. On 4 April 2017, mine awareness events were held on the occasion of International Day of Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action and the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Mine Action Service that involved over 750 children and over 200 UNIFIL personnel.

F. Delineation of borders

39. No progress was made towards the delineation or demarcation of the border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, including in areas where it is uncertain or disputed. During his visit to southern Lebanon on 21 April 2017, Prime Minister Hariri called for the delineation of the international borders, especially in those areas where the border is disputed or uncertain, and reiterated Lebanon's request for United Nations good offices in that regard. There was no progress in addressing the matter of the Shab'a Farms. The Syrian Arab Republic and Israel have yet to respond to the provisional definition of the Shab'a Farms area proposed in my report of 30 October 2007 on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2007/641).

40. On 20 March 2017, in a note verbale, the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations protested the claim by Israel, as reflected in its note verbale of 2 February, that Lebanese offshore blocks 8, 9 and 10 were in "maritime areas that belong to the State of Israel" (see S/2017/201, para. 57). Emphasizing that "Israel is not entitled to interfere in any way whatsoever with the exercise by Lebanon of its sovereign rights and jurisdiction, and is not allowed to conduct any economic activity in Lebanese maritime areas", the note reiterated Lebanon's commitment to the Convention on the Law of the Sea regarding the delimitation of its maritime borders.

G. Political and institutional stability

41. On 16 June 2017, following several delays, the Parliament of Lebanon approved a new electoral law that provides for proportional representation in 15 electoral districts and introduces an additional "preferential vote". By the same token, the Parliament extended its own tenure until May 2018, when elections are projected to be held, pending the decision of the President and the Prime Minister. The International Support Group for Lebanon welcomed the agreement in a joint statement. An extraordinary session of Parliament opened on 21 June and is projected to last until 16 October.

42. The Cabinet has met regularly and passed a number of decrees, including those relating to important appointments to the helms of security institutions. On 8 March 2017, General Joseph Aoun was appointed to the post of Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces; Major-General Imad Othman was appointed to the post of Director General of the Internal Security Forces; and Major-General Abbas Ibrahim was reappointed to the post of Director General of the General Security Office.

43. Lebanese efforts to strengthen the security forces continued with the approval by the Cabinet on 17 May 2017 of the enlistment of 2,000 new recruits into the Lebanese Armed Forces. On 23 May, the Minister of Interior, Nohad Machnouq, announced a five-year development plan for the Internal Security Forces as part of capacity-building efforts. Other Cabinet decisions included: a draft State budget for 2017, subsequently sent to Parliament for ratification, which remains pending; a new electricity plan; and the renewal of the term of the Governor of the Central Bank until 2023.

44. The Government of Lebanon, with the support of the United Nations, is in the final phase of developing Lebanon's national strategy for the prevention of violent extremism, in line with the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, presented in 2016. The strategy is undergoing a consultative interministerial process aimed at ensuring ownership and a concerted effort by all line ministries in its implementation.

45. The Committee Against Torture, established under article 17 of the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, made a number of recommendations following its review, in April 2017, of the first report by Lebanon to the Committee, submitted with a 15-year delay. The Committee highlighted the need for a law criminalizing torture as a serious human rights violation and additional measures to address impunity. The Committee recalled the absolute prohibition on extraditing individuals to countries where they may face torture. The Committee also reiterated the need for a national human rights institution that would also serve as a national preventive mechanism against torture. The Government of Lebanon established such a national human rights institution by law in late 2016, but the nominations for its members have yet to be endorsed.

46. Six years into the Syrian conflict, over 70 per cent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, of which 53 per cent are children, live below the poverty line. It is estimated that 93 per cent of the Syrian refugee population experiences some degree of food insecurity, a trend that continues to worsen. More than half of refugee households are not able to afford the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket, which is a measure of the minimum amount of basic items needed by the average refugee household each month. In addition, the dwellings of 42 per cent of households do not meet minimum humanitarian standards. Children remain especially vulnerable, with nearly half of primary-school age refugee children out of school.

47. Almost three-quarters of Syrian refugees resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as early marriage, begging or child labour, as well as reducing essential expenses, including for education and health care. As remaining savings and assets increasingly run out, households are also sinking deeper into debt: 90 per cent of refugee households are borrowing money or receiving credit. While Syrian refugees are now allowed to work legally in the sectors of agriculture, construction and waste management, their livelihood opportunities are limited. The Government of Lebanon also started to implement its previously announced decision to waive residency renewal fees for Syrian refugees registered in Lebanon. The 2016 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees pointed to the need of Syrian refugees for increased access to technical and vocational education and training as being key to reducing their socioeconomic vulnerability and their dependency on aid.

48. In follow-up to the London and Brussels conferences on supporting Syria and the region, my Deputy Special Coordinator/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon is leading a United Nations joint effort to facilitate an easing of the restrictions that face refugees in Lebanon, while also ensuring parallel support for Lebanese host communities. That effort is guided by a focused action and advocacy plan developed by relevant United Nations agencies, which calls for pragmatic solutions to support vulnerable Lebanese individuals and refugees (Syrian and Palestine refugees), including through the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan.

49. At the Brussels conference, Prime Minister Hariri warned of increasing indications of tensions between host communities and refugees. He presented the parameters of the Government's vision for stabilization and development, including the contours of a capital investment plan for large infrastructure projects, which would be used as a main vehicle for job creation for the next seven to eight years.

50. Donors continue to generously support Lebanon in mitigating the impact of the Syrian conflict and to assist Syrian and Palestine refugees in the country, but the disbursement of pledges is slowing down. As at 31 May 2017, resources committed amounted to $1.41 billion for the year 2017, which includes $1.1 billion in donor assistance and $309 million carried over by United Nations agencies from the previous year. In addition, donors have already committed $940.7 million in support of Lebanon for 2018 and beyond. United Nations agencies and NGOs reported a total of $236.3 million received under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan in 2017. That represents 8.6 per cent of the overall appeal for 2017 of $2.8 billion, which constitutes a downward trend compared with the preceding year.

51. Palestine refugees remain one of the most vulnerable populations in Lebanon, an estimated 65 per cent of whom live in poverty. Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, estimated by UNRWA to number around 32,000, are particularly vulnerable. Approximately 90 per cent of them live in poverty, of which 9 per cent live in extreme poverty. An estimated 98 per cent of them rely upon UNRWA assistance as their main source of income; those refugees also find it increasingly difficult to maintain legal residency in the country. UNRWA has asked the Lebanese authorities to permit that category of refugees to renew their residency permits free of charge. An official census of Palestine refugees in Lebanon was launched by the Lebanese authorities and is in its initial stage. Due to conclude by the end of the year, the exercise will also generate new vulnerability indicators.

52. In the Nahr el-Bared camp, in northern Lebanon, protests took place from mid-March to early June 2017, with protesters calling upon UNRWA to resume rental subsidies for families displaced by the 2007 clashes that have yet to return to their homes. The protests disrupted UNRWA operations, which have now resumed in full. My Special Coordinator visited the camp on 8 June and emphasized the urgent need for the completion of the entire camp's reconstruction and support for the families most in need. United Nations-wide support and cooperation with the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee continues with a view to improving the situation of Palestine refugees in Lebanon, without prejudice to the resolution of the refugee question in the context of a comprehensive peace settlement.

III. Security and safety of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

53. UNIFIL continuously reviewed its security plans and risk mitigation measures, in particular following security threat warnings, in close coordination with the Lebanese authorities. In view of the armed clashes in the Ein El Helweh Palestine refugee camp in Sidon, situated along the main supply route connecting the UNIFIL area of operations with Beirut, local authorities and UNIFIL made adjustments to their movements.

54. UNIFIL continued to monitor proceedings in the Lebanese military courts against individuals suspected of planning or perpetrating serious attacks against UNIFIL. With regard to the attack against UNIFIL peacekeepers serving with the Spanish contingent in 2007, a hearing at the Permanent Military Court planned for 29 May 2017 was rescheduled to 5 July. In the case of terror intent, opened in January 2014, the Court held a hearing on 20 March 2017; the next hearing is scheduled for 5 July. In the case of an attempted serious attack against UNIFIL in 2008, in which one of the four sentenced perpetrators filed an appeal, the Military Court of Appeal held a hearing on 9 May 2017 and scheduled the next hearing for 2 November. In three cases of serious attacks perpetrated in 2011 against UNIFIL peacekeepers from France and Italy, investigations are ongoing. In the case of a

homicide committed in 1980, when three UNIFIL peacekeepers from Ireland were shot dead, hearings at the Permanent Military Court were held on 17 March and 16 June 2017; the next hearing is scheduled for 26 July.

IV. Deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

55. As at 15 June, UNIFIL comprised 10,409 military personnel, including 412 women, or 4 per cent of the Force, from 40 troop-contributing countries; 235 international staff, including 76 women; and 579 national civilian staff, including 147 women. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force comprised five corvettes, one fast patrol boat, one offshore patrol vessel, two helicopters, and 845 of the Force's total military personnel, including 11 women. In addition, 50 military observers, including 3 women, of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, serve with Observer Group Lebanon, under the operational control of UNIFIL.

V. Conduct and discipline

56. UNIFIL and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon continued to strengthen existing preventive measures against sexual exploitation and abuse, inter alia, by conducting an in-depth assessment of the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse and implementing a comprehensive internal and external communications strategy to ensure that all Mission personnel, as well as members of the local community, are aware of the expected standards of behaviour for United Nations personnel and of how to report any shortcomings, including with respect to sexual exploitation and abuse. In collaboration with the United Nations country team and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, the UNIFIL standing sexual exploitation and abuse task force reviewed the risk management framework for sexual exploitation and abuse and developed a workplan to implement additional measures to reinforce the framework. During the period under review, UNIFIL received one allegation of sexual exploitation and abuse, which was promptly processed within the applicable timelines. No allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse were received by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon.

VI. Observations

57. I am encouraged by the continued progress made by Lebanon towards the genuine reactivation of all of its State institutions. Positive momentum needs to be maintained to reinforce the country's ability to withstand the challenges that lie ahead. The stability of Lebanon remains a regional public good. United Nations efforts will continue to be guided by the need to ensure stability while prioritizing prevention, including through the implementation of the United Nations strategic framework for Lebanon (2017-2020).

58. I welcome the agreement on a new electoral framework as the result of a Lebanese-owned process and as a positive sign that hard-won political progress can be sustained. I am hopeful that that achievement can pave the way for additional political and economic recovery and further the overall stability of Lebanon. Political leadership, responsibility and accountability will remain key to ensuring timely, peaceful and transparent parliamentary elections that honour Lebanon's democratic tradition and respond to the pressing concerns of Lebanon's citizens. The United Nations stands ready to provide electoral assistance to support the

Ministry of Interior and Municipalities and other relevant authorities in promptly addressing any factors that have the potential to cause delays.

59. I note the absence of a quota for women in the new law and count on the political leaders and civil society of Lebanon to continue to promote progress towards the full and effective participation of women in political life, as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals. I encourage the relevant decision makers to ensure that the commitments of Lebanon are fulfilled and that there will be adequate representation of women in the upcoming elections.

60. The continued commitment of Lebanon and Israel to Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) is of crucial importance. I commend in that regard the visit on 21 April 2017 by Prime Minister Hariri, Defence Minister Sarraf and Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Aoun to southern Lebanon and the Blue Line as a sign of the determination of the Government and the Lebanese Armed Forces to ensure that they are the sole authority and protector of the calm and stability of a sovereign Lebanon.

61. I also welcome the Prime Minister Hariri's public statement that a permanent ceasefire must be pursued. Given that it remains the best guarantee for long-term stability, I reiterate the readiness of the United Nations to further assist in that regard. I encourage the parties to actively explore with my Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander tangible confidence-building measures that can help sustain calm and gradually pave the way towards a permanent ceasefire. I urge the parties to refrain from provocative actions, exercise restraint and desist from rhetoric, which exacerbates the risk of miscalculation and heightens the risk of renewed conflict.

62. While the situation along the Blue Line has remained relatively calm, the underlying risks posed by the presence of unauthorized weapons and factors of regional instability should not be underestimated. I remain concerned about the continuing presence of unauthorized weapons in the area between the Litani River and the Blue Line, in breach of resolution 1701 (2006). I note with grave concern the highly provocative presence of uniformed and armed combatants during the media tour organized by Hizbullah in the UNIFIL area of operations, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Hizbullah's continued public acknowledgement of its possession of weapons outside the control of the State clearly contravenes resolution 1701 (2006). Both warrant strong condemnation.

63. As stipulated in resolution 1701 (2006), I call upon the Government of Lebanon to take all actions necessary to ensure the full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords and of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), which require the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon so that, pursuant to the Lebanese Cabinet decision of 27 July 2006, there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than those of the Lebanese State. The United Nations remains committed and ready to support the Lebanese authorities in that endeavour. It also remains important that earlier decisions of the national dialogue be implemented, specifically those relating to the disarmament of non-Lebanese groups and the dismantling of the military bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada.

64. I reiterate my condemnation of all violations of Lebanese sovereignty, in disregard of the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). The Israel Defense Forces continued to occupy northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). I also reiterate my call to Israel to cease immediately its overflights of Lebanese airspace and to withdraw its forces from northern Ghajar and the adjacent area north of the Blue Line.

65. UNIFIL liaison and coordination arrangements and the good offices of my Special Coordinator remain critical for information exchange between the two sides and have helped prevent misunderstandings, de-escalate tension and prevent small incidents from evolving into larger-scale violence. The tripartite mechanism remains an effective forum, and I am encouraged by the active engagement of the parties in it. I also reiterate the strategic importance of the Blue Line marking process.

66. I commend the Lebanese Armed Forces for their performance in contributing to calm along the Blue Line and in the conduct of counter-terrorism operations along the border with the Syrian Arab Republic and throughout the country. In shielding Lebanon against threats from extremism and the proliferation of illicit weapons, the Lebanese Armed Forces continues to demonstrate its essential role in the extension of State authority throughout the territory of Lebanon, defending the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and acting as the protector of the country's security.

67. I reiterate my call to President Michel Aoun to work towards a resumption of the national dialogue with the objective of arriving at a national defence strategy. That would, inter alia, address the issue of arms outside the control of the State and other outstanding provisions of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006).

68. I call upon Member States to continue to support the capacity development of the Lebanese security institutions, including through demining and clearance activities, and to coordinate their assistance through the International Support Group for Lebanon. An updated capability development plan for the Lebanese Armed Forces will be instrumental to identifying needs and set priorities in that regard.

69. As part of the implementation of the strategic review recommendations, I am pleased to note the close engagement between UNIFIL and the Lebanese authorities on the concept of deploying a "model Lebanese Armed Forces regiment" that would work closely with UNIFIL in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). I encourage Member States to direct their assistance, within the wider framework of the capability development plan for the Lebanese Armed Forces and the UNIFIL-Lebanese Armed Forces strategic dialogue, to supporting such a model regiment to further strengthen the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy with respect to securing the territorial waters of Lebanon.

70. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force has proved its operational effectiveness in its maritime interdiction operations at the request of the Government of Lebanon. The Mission's close cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy in that context forms an important contribution to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). Those operations are a significant deterrent against the illegal entry of weapons or related materiel. Daily interaction and exercises with the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy have helped develop the Navy, which remains constrained however by a lack of adequate maritime vessels.

71. I take note of the 20 April 2017 request of the Permanent Representative of Lebanon for an update on efforts to assist with the delineation of the exclusive economic zone between Lebanon and Israel. Contacts continue with all parties concerned as part of the United Nations good offices on the basis of the exchange of letters between my predecessor and the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Tammam Salam. Prime Minister Hariri has reaffirmed the request by Lebanon for the United Nations to play a role in that regard, and the parties remain closely engaged with my Special Coordinator for Lebanon. I remain hopeful that Lebanon and Israel can commit to a constructive approach to exploiting maritime oil and gas resources, which is a shared economic interest, in a consensual way that minimizes tensions and serves as a confidence-building measure.

72. It is the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon, as the host Government, to ensure the safety and security of UNIFIL personnel and their freedom of movement throughout the area of operations. I call upon the Lebanese authorities to continue their close cooperation with UNIFIL to guarantee adequate protection of peacekeepers, including by bringing to justice the perpetrators of acts committed against them.

73. The participation of Lebanese nationals in the Syrian conflict constitutes a breach of the policy of disassociation, pursuant to the Baabda Declaration agreed by all Lebanese political parties, and poses a risk the stability of Lebanon at a time when it must remain shielded from regional turmoil. I reiterate my condemnation of the participation of any Lebanese national in the Syrian conflict and call upon Hizbullah and all Lebanese parties to cease any involvement in it.

74. I condemn the movement of fighters and weapons across the Lebanese-Syrian border in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and the shelling and shooting into Lebanese border areas from the Syrian Arab Republic. The continued lack of a delineated, demarcated Lebanese-Syrian border is no justification for violations of Lebanese sovereignty by any party. I call upon all concerned to cease violations of the border and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon.

75. I look forward to progress towards a fully staffed and functioning national human rights institution and its mechanism to prevent torture, pursuant to Lebanon's commitments under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and recently adopted legislation. The capacity to prevent human rights abuses will be an important element of the stability and prevention agenda for Lebanon.

76. The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the resulting refugee presence continue to pose daunting challenges to Lebanon. I am grateful to the people of Lebanon, whose hospitality in hosting refugees has continued for many years now. The Government's decision to waive the residency renewal fees will have a positive impact on the protection of the Syrian refugees eligible for that waiver, if applied consistently. I hope that the residency renewal fee waiver will be extended to all Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

77. The Brussels conference, held in April 2017, reaffirmed the international community's solidarity with the host countries in the region. Despite pledges received in that forum for the Lebanon Crisis Response Fund and for humanitarian and development assistance through grants and concessional loans, I am concerned that a slowdown in funding will affect the Government's response. I therefore call upon all Member States to provide the means necessary to ensure the provision of urgently needed basic assistance and to mobilize additional longer-term development resources.

78. The renewed violence in Ein el Helweh is one illustration of the persistent risks to Lebanon that result from a combination of political fragility, dire socioeconomic conditions, radical ideologies and the presence of weapons outside the State's authority. I call upon all Palestinian factions to unite against extremist group violence, especially since militant elements that are still hiding in camps expose the entire community to the risk of a resumption of violence. I welcome the efforts to preserve stability in Ein El Helweh by the joint Palestinian security forces, which must remain able to perform their duties in order to shield the camp's residents. It is important that cooperation continue between the Lebanese authorities and Palestinian factions in that regard. Security measures should at all times be compatible with humanitarian principles and human rights standards.

79. The lack of funding for UNRWA remains of serious concern. Greater donor support, including for the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared, remains key to maintaining stability in the camps and surrounding areas and as a matter of ensuring dignified conditions for Palestine refugees in Lebanon.

80. I welcome the steps taken by the Government towards the development of a national strategy for counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism in Lebanon and encourage the Government to avail itself of the full support of the United Nations and other stakeholders to that end. I encourage national and international partners to engage in that effort in close coordination with the United Nations and international partners.

81. The message of tolerance and coexistence of Lebanon remains a rare commodity in a region in turmoil. I urge efforts by the parties to the conflict and all stakeholders concerned, including all communities in the country, to prevent any resurgence of conflict, negative impact of regional tensions or relapse into political paralysis. The United Nations will continue to work as one in support of Lebanon, in close partnership with the Government, civil society and its international partners.

82. I wish to extend my appreciation to all countries contributing troops and equipment to UNIFIL and Observer Group Lebanon. I thank my Special Coordinator, Sigrid Kaag, the staff of her office, the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Michael Beary, and the civilian and military personnel of UNIFIL for their continued efforts.

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Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2299 (2016)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2299 (2016), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on progress made towards fulfilling the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The report covers key developments related to Iraq and provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Iraq since my last report (S/2017/357) and the briefing of my Special Representative to the Security Council on 22 May 2017.

II. Summary of key political developments pertaining to Iraq

A. Political situation

2. On 9 July, the Prime Minister of Iraq, Haider al-Abadi, arrived in Mosul to congratulate Iraq's security forces on liberating the city from Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The Prime Minister further stated that victory was around the corner. On 21 June, while the Iraqi security forces were reportedly approximately 100 metres south of the Nuri mosque, where ISIL had declared its so-called caliphate, ISIL destroyed the mosque and its iconic leaning minaret. On 29 June, Iraqi security forces announced that they had taken control of the area of the destroyed Nuri mosque. Iraqi security forces are currently making efforts to establish full control over the old city.

3. On 6 June, Prime Minister Al-Abadi stressed the need to balance progress against ISIL with minimizing casualties among civilians and Iraqi security forces. On 13 June, he praised support from the people of Mosul to the Iraqi security forces and highlighted Government-established corridors for evacuating people from the old city.

4. As Mosul is freed from ISIL, military operations will increasingly focus on the border between Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and on areas still under ISIL control. During their operations in Ninawa governorate, the popular mobilization forces and the Peshmerga reportedly established alliances with local fighters of various backgrounds, including in areas being contested by the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government. Tensions emerged over the operations of the popular mobilization forces in the Qayrawan subdistrict of Sinjar district, from

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12 to 23 May. On 23 May, Prime Minister Al-Abadi reaffirmed Baghdad's agreement with the Kurdistan Regional Government, under which the Peshmerga would keep control of areas in Ninawa governorate that they had held prior to the Mosul operation in October 2016. He emphasized the need to address disputed areas through dialogue and through the formation of a joint Iraqi security forces and Peshmerga force in Sinjar. According to a statement issued by the Peshmerga on 30 May and to a statement by the Presidency of the Kurdistan region of Iraq on 31 May, the liberation of Yazidi-majority villages by the popular mobilization forces contravenes a prior agreement that stipulated that a joint Iraqi security forces and Peshmerga force should liberate those villages. On 30 May, the Kurdistan Regional President, Massoud Barzani, warned against intrusions into disputed territories under the Kurdistan Regional Government's control prior to 2014.

5. While progress against ISIL is being achieved, this situation underscores the need to advance national reconciliation in parallel with that progress. On 17 May, under the sponsorship of the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Salim al-Jubouri, and in coordination with UNAMI, a conference on the theme "The future of the Turkmens within a unified Iraq", attended by 500 participants, was convened. Representatives of the President and the Prime Minister, and heads of Turkmen political parties and Turkmen parliamentarians attended. The aim of the conference was to formulate a unified vision on post-ISIL Iraq and the role of the Turkmens.

6. UNAMI also received multiple papers from various groups on national reconciliation, which included recommendations from religious and ethnic minority groups, civil society and youth. The Mission is comparing and analysing these proposals to identify common themes, which will support future discussions of UNAMI with key stakeholders.

7. No tangible progress occurred in the implementation of the Popular Mobilization Commission Law. On 30 May, Prime Minister Al-Abadi stressed that all Iraqi security forces, including the popular mobilization forces, operated under his command. Several leaders of those forces reaffirmed the Prime Minister's statement on 13 June.

8. There was no progress on amending the legal framework for elections. The Council of Representatives continued to consider amendments to the Law on Provincial and District Council Elections (Law No. 36 of 2008, as amended), the Law on the Independent High Electoral Commission (Law No. 11 of 2007), and the Law on the Council of Representatives Elections (Law No. 45 of 2013). According to the calendar of the Independent High Electoral Commission, 16 April 2017 was the deadline for establishing clarity on the Law on Provincial and District Council Elections. This would have allowed adequate time to prepare for the provincial and district council elections, scheduled for 16 September 2017.

9. On 30 May, citing the Constitution of Iraq, Prime Minister Al-Abadi stated that the elections to the Council of Representatives would have to be held on time irrespective of progress on the legal framework. On 20 June, Speaker of Parliament Al-Jubouri noted that key legislation, including electoral laws, would be on the agenda of the Council of Representatives, which was scheduled to resume on 4 July after the Ramadan break. He commented on the infeasibility of holding provincial and district council elections on time, in September 2017, but noted that the elections to the Council of Representatives, planned for April 2018, would not be postponed.

10. On 7 June, a majority of the political parties represented in the Parliament of the Kurdistan region of Iraq agreed to hold a referendum on independence on 25 September 2017. They also committed to reactivate the Regional Parliament, which last met in October 2015. The Movement for Change (Gorran) and the

Kurdistan Islamic Group boycotted the 7 June meeting. Both averred that the Regional Parliament alone could call a referendum. On 7 June, the Governor of Kirkuk, Najmaldin Karim, reiterated that the referendum would also be held in Kirkuk.

11. On 8 June, Kurdistan Regional President Barzani signed Presidential Order No. 106/2017, calling on the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission and a new High Committee for the Referendum, made up of political party representatives, to make technical arrangements for the referendum. The order stipulated that a single yes-or-no question should comprise the referendum: "Do you agree on the independence of the Kurdistan region and the Kurdistan areas outside the administration of the region, and the establishment of an independent state?"

12. On 12 June, the Executive Committee of the Iraqi Turkmen Front affirmed its opposition to the referendum. On 15 June, a delegation of Members of Parliament from the Iraqi Forces Coalition, through my Special Representative, sent a letter expressing their opposition to the referendum, particularly in disputed areas outside the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

13. On 12 June, the Chair of the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission, Handren Mohammed, told the media that the institution had already received $6 million to prepare for the referendum and would move to set up 12,000 polling stations, including in disputed territories, to accommodate an estimated six million eligible voters. The High Committee on the Referendum, headed by President Barzani, has started to take shape with the setting up of two subcommittees, one on Baghdad-Erbil relations and the disputed territories, and the other on regional outreach.

14. On 13 June, UNAMI met with the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission in Erbil to clarify that the Mission would not provide support related to the referendum. Regarding United Nations support for parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, planned for 6 November 2017, UNAMI encouraged the Commission to communicate a request to the Independent High Electoral Commission in Baghdad, in line with the October 2015 memorandum of cooperation between the two entities. Following the meeting, regional media erroneously reported that UNAMI would oversee the independence referendum, provide training for staff and deploy observers. On 14 June, UNAMI issued a statement that it would not be engaged in any way or form in the referendum, in order to clarify the announcement by the Presidency of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

15. On 9 June, a spokesperson for the federal Government stated that any decision on the future relationship between the Kurdistan region of Iraq and the Government of Iraq had to take all constitutional requirements into account. On 19 June, the head of the Independent High Electoral Commission Governorate Electoral Office in Kirkuk, Qais Muhammad, stated that no preparations for hosting the Kurdistan region of Iraq independence referendum in Kirkuk were being made, as no instructions had been issued from the federal Government.

16. Following a conversation on 10 June, Prime Minister Al-Abadi and Kurdistan Regional President Barzani issued statements emphasizing the importance of dialogue. On 13 June, Prime Minister Al-Abadi said he respected the aspirations of all Iraqi governorates but the time was not right for a referendum, considering the situation within Iraq and likely regional reactions. He announced that he would invite a delegation from the Kurdistan region of Iraq to visit Baghdad, to agree on a road map to resolve outstanding issues. On 19 June, Speaker of Parliament Al-Jubouri met with Kurdistan Regional President Barzani in Erbil to reiterate Prime Minister Al-Abadi's message. Following the meeting, the Presidency of the

Kurdistan region of Iraq issued a statement saying that the decision to hold a referendum was "irreversible", while at the same time stressing the need for dialogue. In a meeting with my Special Representative on 20 June 2017, President Barzani confirmed his position on holding a referendum on 25 September 2017.

17. International actors, including Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the United States of America reiterated their support for the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq and emphasized the need for dialogue within the framework of the Constitution of Iraq. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, reportedly confirmed the opposition of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the referendum in a meeting with Prime Minister Al-Abadi on 20 June in Tehran. The Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran underlined that the Kurdistan region of Iraq was part of Iraq, and reaffirmed the commitment of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Iraq's territorial integrity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey called the move towards a referendum "a grave mistake" that "would have negative consequences which will cause further instability." On 13 June, the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Boris Johnson, issued a statement saying a referendum at this time would distract from the more urgent priorities of defeating ISIL, stabilizing liberated areas and addressing the political issues that led to the rise of ISIL. He noted that such a plebiscite would first need to be agreed with the federal Government and cautioned that unilateral moves towards independence would harm the Kurdistan region of Iraq and regional stability.

18. On 19 June, the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union issued a statement stressing that unilateral steps must be avoided and that all open questions must be resolved through consensual positions based on the full application of the provisions of the Constitution of Iraq. The European Union also called on the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to engage in dialogue on all issues across the political and economic spectrum, including disputed internal boundaries. On 11 June, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani, stated that international reactions to the announcement of the referendum were "normal" and expected.

19. On 13 June, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan reached a preliminary agreement on the reactivation of the Kurdistan Regional Parliament. According to the agreement, the Parliament would convene under the current speakership of Yousuf Mohammed (Gorran) for one session, after which the Speaker would resign and be replaced. On 14 June, the Movement for Change (Gorran) rejected the proposal and restated its longstanding position that the reconvening of parliament must be without preconditions. On 18 June, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan released a statement conditioning its support for the referendum on the reactivation of parliament and the passing of a law for the approval of the referendum.

B. Security

20. On 24 May, the popular mobilization forces launched operations in the Ba'aj district, liberating the district capital on 4 June. The popular mobilization forces reached the border of Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic on 29 May and reinforced their defensive positions along the border. On 30 May, Prime Minister Al-Abadi emphasized that these operations had taken place on his orders, which was reiterated by the popular mobilization forces spokesperson, Ahmed al-Asadi, on 1 June. Mr. Asadi stressed that the popular mobilization forces would not enter the Syrian Arab Republic without the approval of the Council of Representatives and the Prime Minister. On 6 June, Prime Minister Al-Abadi reiterated that Iraqi forces were not

allowed to cross the border into the Syrian Arab Republic. On 8 June, Mr. Asadi announced that the popular mobilization forces now controlled 55 km of the border between Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. On 13 June, the Ministry of Defence of Iraq announced a joint coordination centre with the Ministry of Defence of the Syrian Arab Republic aimed at promoting cooperation in border control and intelligence sharing. On 17 June, the Iraqi security forces announced the liberation of the area along the borders of the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Jordan, including the Al-Waleed border post. One of the three official land crossings, this strategic post allows road access between Baghdad and Damascus through Anbar governorate.

21. ISIL continued to maintain its control over Hawijah district in Kirkuk governorate and over parts of Anbar governorate. Asymmetrical attacks were frequently launched against civilian and military targets in various governorates, including Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din. On 29 May, a suicide vehicle bomb detonated in the Karradah neighbourhood of Baghdad, killing at least 11 and wounding 47 people, mainly civilians celebrating Ramadan. Another suicide vehicle bomb exploded in the Karkh neighbourhood of Baghdad the next morning, killing 10 civilians and wounding 40. ISIL claimed responsibility for both attacks.

22. Since my last report, Iraqi security forces have intensified operations against ISIL in the Rutbah area of Anbar governorate and in northern Babil and eastern Diyala governorates, where increased ISIL activity has been reported since mid-May.

C. Rule of law

23. The rule of law in Iraq requires further strengthening. Kidnapping, extortion and hostage-taking, whatever the motive, are increasingly a problem. Such acts undermine trust in the Government and its security institutions. In May, the National Intelligence Cell, headed by Prime Minister Al-Abadi, acknowledged the interconnection between terrorism and organized crime and took measures to prevent, resolve and bring to justice perpetrators of such crimes. The Ministry of the Interior established a special unit that will aim to prevent, counter and investigate kidnappings.

24. Concern continued over the many hundreds of alleged disappearances which took place last year in Al-Sejar and Saqlawiyah in Anbar and at Razazah checkpoint and in 2017 in Taremia. These remain unresolved with no updates from the Government of Iraq regarding the status of investigations, despite formal requests by UNAMI. UNAMI is also assessing the veracity of allegations of the existence of secret prisons run by various armed groups.

D. Regional and international developments

25. Iraq continued its regional and international engagement to promote political, military, humanitarian and economic cooperation. On 18 May, the President of Iraq, Fuad Masum, met in Amman with the Hashemite King of Jordan, Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein, to discuss bilateral relations. On 20 May, President Masum, Vice-President Osama al-Nujaifi and Defence Minister Irfan al-Hayali travelled to Riyadh to attend the Arab Islamic American Summit. Commenting on the outcomes of the Summit, on 23 May the Prime Minister underscored that Iraq's regional relations were based on a recognition of common interests and stressed that the country's objective was to maintain a balance in its international affairs. He also expressed his view that the provision in the declaration agreed at the Summit to

establish a reserve force of 34,000 troops to support anti-terrorism operations in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq would apply only to the Syrian Arab Republic. The Prime Minister rejected foreign interference in Iraq's internal affairs and the presence of foreign forces on Iraqi territory without an explicit invitation, and insisted on the need for all countries to respect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

26. On 24 May, the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of Iraq, Mohammed al-Sudani, visited the United Arab Emirates, where he met with a senior official in the Ministry of the Economy to discuss economic cooperation. On 25 May, Iraq and the other members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) agreed to extend the November 2016 crude oil output reduction agreement, due to expire in June, by another nine months. Prior to the OPEC meeting, on 22 May, Prime Minister Al-Abadi and Oil Minister Jabbar al-Luaibi met with the Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources of Saudi Arabia, Khalid bin Abdulaziz al-Falih, in Baghdad.

27. On 23 May, Prime Minister Al-Abadi indicated that a large sum of money, confiscated by the Iraqi authorities from a private Qatari aeroplane on 21 April, had not yet been returned to the Qatari authorities. He explained that a committee had been formed and that the matter would be referred to the judiciary after the committee issued its findings. The Prime Minister met with the Foreign Minister of Qatar, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, on 22 May, during which he received an official invitation from the Emir of Qatar to visit his country. Iraqi Speaker Al-Jubouri met with the Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, in Doha on 4 June, confirming the importance of the bilateral relationship.

28. After Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and other countries announced that they would sever diplomatic ties with Qatar on 5 June, Vice-Presidents Ayad Allawi and Osama al-Nujaifi issued statements on the same day, calling for dialogue. On 6 June, Prime Minister Al-Abadi reaffirmed Iraq's intention to maintain good relations with all countries in the region. On 12 June, President Masum was reported to offer Iraqi mediation to resolve the crisis through dialogue. On 13 June, Prime Minister Al-Abadi reconfirmed that Iraq wanted to cooperate with all countries in the region and did not want to get involved in regional disputes. He stressed that his Government was against sanctions on other countries, as a matter of principle.

29. On 24 May, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, attended the International Conference on the Victims of Ethnic and Religious Violence in the Middle East, held in Madrid. Mr. Al-Jaafari called on the international community to extend assistance to minorities so that they could remain in their ancestral places. On the margins of the conference, Mr. Al-Jaafari discussed bilateral relations with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, Anwar Gargash, with a focus on the facilitation of entry visas for Iraqi citizens.

30. The Chancellor of the Security Council of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Masrour Barzani, visited Washington, D.C., from 15 to 22 May to discuss anti-ISIL operations. Among others, Chancellor Barzani met with members of the United States National Security Council, Assistant Secretary of Defense Kenneth Handelman, Senator John McCain and the United States President's Special Envoy for the international coalition to counter ISIL, Brett McGurk. From 1 to 3 June, Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani and Minister of Natural Resources Ashti Hawrami attended the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, where the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Russian Federation State-owned oil company Rosneft signed agreements to complement

their agreement of 21 February, aimed at increasing mutual cooperation in the oil and gas sector.

31. On 19 June, Prime Minister Al-Abadi embarked on a regional tour, starting with Saudi Arabia and including visits to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Kuwait. The Prime Minister met King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud of Saudi Arabia. On 20 June, the two countries issued a joint statement, which called for increased cooperation in political, security, economic, trade, investment and energy related matters. On 20 and 21 June, Prime Minister Al-Abadi held meetings in the Islamic Republic of Iran with President Hassan Rouhani, Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Speaker of Parliament Ali Larijani. On 21 June, Prime Minister Al-Abadi met with the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah. While in Kuwait, Prime Minister Al-Abadi also met with the Prime Minister of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Mubarak al-Hamad al-Sabah, and with the First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Sabah al-Khaled al-Hamad al-Sabah.

III. Update on the activities of the Mission and the United Nations country team

A. Political activities

32. My Special Representative continued his engagement with government officials, parliamentarians, representatives of political parties, women's groups, civil society and religious and community leaders to foster inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation, particularly in the post-ISIL period. In his meetings, he underlined the need to safeguard victories against ISIL through building a unified, equal and just Iraq. He called on all political, tribal and community leaders to reject sectarianism and to promote equal participation in the political process, good governance and the rule of law, justice, accountability and equal rights for all citizens. My Special Representative underscored the importance of ensuring voluntary, safe and dignified returns for displaced persons to their homes and the restoration of security and normalcy in liberated areas.

33. My Special Representative continued his engagement with Iraqi parties and countries in the region in support of the National Settlement Initiative as a means of ensuring Iraq's long-term unity and stability. He has encouraged all groups, including minorities, civil society and tribal representatives, to continue sharing their respective visions of national reconciliation and principles for rebuilding post-ISIL Iraq.

34. In addition, on 24 May UNAMI convened a national conference in Baghdad on the theme "Iraq after conflict", which brought together civil society representatives, academics, journalists, activists and tribal and religious leaders from 13 governorates, with the aim of gauging the political aspirations of Iraqis for the post-ISIL phase. Drawing from six previous round tables across the country over the past five months, conference participants endorsed a set of recommendations. On 12 June, a delegation of five civil society actors representing the participants in the six round tables, accompanied by my Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs, shared the recommendations with the Chair of the National Reconciliation Commission at the Office of the Prime Minister, Jaafar al-Husseini.

35. My Special Representative continued to meet regularly with political leaders, as part of an ongoing effort to facilitate dialogue between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government. He urged Baghdad and Erbil to leverage their military cooperation to engage in high-level negotiations on outstanding

issues, including the independence referendum, disputed boundaries and territories, oil exports, revenue sharing, support for the Peshmerga and the voluntary and dignified return of displaced persons to their homes. My Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs travelled to Erbil and Kirkuk, on 29 May and 6 June respectively, to reiterate the need for dialogue with Baghdad on current political issues. He also offered assurances to partners on the readiness of UNAMI to support efforts to maintain peace and security. My Special Representative visited the Kurdistan region of Iraq, and held meetings in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah with President Barzani and top representatives of the leading political forces, alongside representatives of civil society, on 21 June.

36. UNAMI continued to advocate for the safe return to their homes, relevant legislation and other reforms to respect and protect the rights of Iraq's diverse ethnic and religious minority communities. Minorities continue to bear a disproportionate toll. I am pleased to note the announcement by the Supreme Judicial Council on 12 June that it would establish a commission to document and investigate crimes against Yazidis. My Deputy Special Representative attended the International Conference on the Victims of Ethnic and Religious Violence in the Middle East, held on 24 May in Madrid. The Conference discussed the road map set forth in the Paris Action Plan adopted at the previous conference. A total of 59 countries and 10 international and regional organizations participated, and unanimously expressed support for minorities, particularly in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. My Deputy Special Representative emphasized that the Government of Iraq needed to implement confidence-building measures that facilitate national and civic-led reconciliation, protect diversity and guarantee the constitutional rights of minorities.

37. With a view to advancing the agenda on women and peace and security and the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), UNAMI advocated the implementation of the national strategy for the advancement of women with the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government. UNAMI supported a social peace initiative launched by women parliamentarians from Ninawa, which the Council of Representatives endorsed. Civil society groups and other activists continued to advocate for the withdrawal of proposed amendments to the Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959, currently under consideration by the Council of Representatives.

38. The United Nations in Iraq has active partnerships with civil society organizations on the reform of legislative frameworks that protect women and children from all forms of violence. To address conflict-related sexual violence in Iraq, UNAMI continued to support the Government of Iraq's efforts on the implementation of the joint communiqué between the Government and the United Nations. Round-table forums with religious leaders continued, constituting broad consultations to explore community-based protection actions and to advance the protection of survivors of sexual violence and children born of rape. Protection for children born of rape remains a concern because of the associated stigma.

B. Electoral assistance

39. The process to select the new Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission was met with keen interest both by political parties and the general public. The outgoing Commissioners complete their term on 20 September 2017. While most political forces agree that the current Board should complete its tenure, some parliamentarians associated with Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr continue to advocate for the immediate dismissal of the current Board.

40. The ad hoc committee of the Council of Representatives tasked with the selection of the next Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission continued its work. At the request of the Council of Representatives, UNAMI has been attending the meetings of the ad hoc committee, providing technical assistance in developing criteria for screening applicants and preparing the selection process. Of 948 applications, the committee shortlisted 109 applicants for interviews, seven of whom are women. The committee has sent the shortlist to the relevant ministries and commissions for vetting. Interviews were scheduled to take place after Ramadan. The committee announced its intention to complete the selection before the expiration of the current Board's term on 20 September 2017. UNAMI has advocated for the inclusion of qualified women on the next Board.

41. As at 8 June, only 71 political parties had registered out of 250 parties that submitted their applications to the Independent High Electoral Commission for the provincial and district council elections. There has been limited coverage of the special registration process for voters who are displaced persons, with only 265,000 registered thus far out of an estimated 1.6 million displaced, which amounts to 16 per cent. Hence, other important milestones in the electoral calendar are behind schedule.

42. Despite uncertainties concerning the electoral calendar, the Independent High Electoral Commission continues planning for future electoral events, with UNAMI providing advisory support on a number of preparatory activities, including finalization of the necessary regulations and electoral procedures. The Commission has made progress in preparing for the printing of electronic voter cards and the production of electronic ballot-counting technologies.

43. The Independent High Electoral Commission and the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission made progress in implementing the memorandum of cooperation signed between the two institutions, facilitated by UNAMI. On 28 May, the Independent High Electoral Commission shared with the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission files containing the list of registered voters for Erbil, Dahuk and Sulaymaniyah governorates. This took place after a delegation from the Independent High Electoral Commission visited Erbil between 8 and 11 May to assess the capacities and needs of the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission with regard to the voter registry, the results and database management.

C. Human rights developments and activities

44. Armed conflict, terrorism and acts of violence continued to take a toll on civilians. Between 23 May and 11 June 2017, at least 445 civilian men, women and children were killed and at least 326 were wounded, bringing the total number of civilian casualties in Iraq since the beginning of the armed conflict in January 2014 to at least 82,365 (28,938 killed and 53,427 wounded).

45. As more civilians are liberated from ISIL, the extent of the group's human rights violations is becoming evident. UNAMI has received an overwhelming number of reports indicating serious and systematic violations of international humanitarian law and gross abuses of human rights perpetrated by ISIL. The group continued to use civilians and civilian infrastructure and private homes as shields and has conducted organized terrorist activities directly targeting civilians. In addition, sources indicate that there may be 1,670 Yazidi women and girls who remain in ISIL enslavement (latest figures available as at 30 April).

46. UNAMI continued to advocate for accountability in the context of human rights violations and abuses committed in the ongoing armed conflict, in particular serious crimes that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and,

possibly, genocide. UNAMI also continued advocating for legal reforms and worked on expanding the capacities of the judiciary to address international crimes effectively. UNAMI has also been promoting the need for proper protection of mass graves, with the aim of collecting and preserving evidence.

47. ISIL continued to target civilians in areas retaken by Iraqi security forces, including through shelling and weaponized drones. For example, on 17 May an attack by ISIL using drone-delivered explosives at the main entrance of the main hospital of Sharqat district city centre, Salah al-Din, killed one police officer and wounded five male civilians and three police officers.

48. ISIL continued to punish civilians accused of cooperating with Iraqi security forces and for trying to flee areas under its control. On 22 May, ISIL reportedly killed 16 civilians in Hawija district, Kirkuk governorate. The victims were accused of cooperation with Iraqi security forces and/or helping families to flee areas controlled by the group. On 23 May, ISIL captured 11 civilian men on a street in the ISIL-controlled Saraj Khana neighbourhood of western Mosul, while they were fleeing towards Iraqi security forces positions. Later on the same day, ISIL shot and killed them in the same location, leaving the bodies on the street.

49. Several mass casualty attacks, either claimed by ISIL or which bore the hallmarks of previous attacks carried out by the armed group, occurred in various governorates. On 19 May, two double suicide attacks in Baghdad and Basrah governorate in total killed at least 29 people and wounded at least 56 others. On 28 May, a suicide attacker on a motorbike detonated his belt in Ba'qubah city, Diyala governorate. Five persons were killed and 11 others and 3 police members were wounded. On 30 May, two suicide vehicle attacks targeting public places in central Baghdad killed at least 20 civilians and wounded at least 68. On the same day, an attack by an individual wearing an explosive vest in Hit city centre, Anbar governorate, killed at least 10 civilians and wounded at least 24. Four Iraqi Army members were also reportedly killed.

50. UNAMI received reports of violations committed by government and pro-government forces, and referred these cases to the Government for investigation. UNAMI reiterated that the Government must prevent such incidents from occurring, investigate them and, whenever they are substantiated, hold the perpetrators accountable. For example, on 5 May, reportedly the Al-Sab'awi tribal committee met in Hajj Ali village, Qayyarah subdistrict of Mosul. The outcome was a written decision that subcommittees are to be formed to prepare lists of alleged ISIL members and families with members who are allegedly associated with ISIL, and then evict those on the lists. Later on the same day, in Ein Mozan village, Qayyarah subdistrict, 11 members of one family were evicted by the local Al-Sab'awi community. UNAMI received reports of civilians being killed and wounded as a result of government operations and Iraqi and international counter-ISIL coalition air strikes. On 28 May, an air strike hit a group of civilians as they were walking in the ISIL-controlled old city of Mosul. The air strike reportedly killed 15 civilians, including four women and two children, and wounded eight others, including a child and three women.

51. Children continue to be heavily affected by the conflict in Iraq. In particular, the ongoing offensive in the Mosul area and counter-terrorism efforts highlighted a number of child protection challenges. During the month of May, the United Nations documented 40 incidents of violations against children, affecting a total of 74 children; 37 incidents involved killing and maiming, primarily in Ninawa governorate, with 18 children confirmed killed and 56 maimed. The United Nations also documented three incidents of attacks on schools and hospitals in Ninawa.

52. The high number of attacks on health facilities and health personnel, reported by the World Health Organization (WHO), is concerning. Parties to the conflict need to be mindful about their international humanitarian law obligations to respect the sanctuary of health facilities and of their accountability for any transgressions.

53. Following the conclusion of the battle for Mosul, the return of displaced persons to their homes will become an important undertaking; principled and needs-based humanitarian assistance will remain crucial, which includes ensuring that returns are safe and voluntary. The international community needs to ensure that people who have lost everything receive help. Safety and security will be key to creating conditions conducive for return. The protection of civilians must remain at the centre of the counter-ISIL approach. Even after ISIL is expelled from Mosul, respect for international humanitarian and human rights law will remain fundamental to reconciliation and recovery.

D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development

54. Iraq's humanitarian situation continues to affect millions of people. Since the start of the Mosul operation in October 2016, more than 878,000 people have fled, including 702,000 from western neighbourhoods. Following the Government's 25 May announcement recommending that civilians in the old city leave their homes and evacuate with the assistance of Iraqi security forces, humanitarian partners have been bracing for large-scale displacement.

55. Civilians in areas where fighting is ongoing are at severe risk. Entrances to the old city are strictly controlled and there are reports of booby-trapped buildings and homes. Civilians are being used as human shields and ISIL snipers are targeting families, including children, who try to flee. Food, safe drinking water and medicine are in short supply. While most civilians will leave, many, including the elderly and disabled, may be stranded, unable or unwilling to leave and at risk from bombardment, crossfire and lack of water and electricity.

56. The rate of trauma injuries among people fleeing Mosul is alarming. Nearly 13,600 people have received emergency medical care at trauma stabilization points and been referred to specialized hospital care at field hospitals since October 2016. Of the 7,500 injured in fighting in western Mosul, nearly a third are female or children under the age of 15 years.

57. Of the 878,000 people who have fled the hostilities in Mosul, 682,000 are displaced. Half are sheltered in 19 camps and emergency sites established by authorities and humanitarian partners around Mosul. Emergency food and water are being provided to people along routes out of the city. Shading to protect people from the sun has been set up in screening sites. Camp capacity continues to expand rapidly and is keeping pace with displacements. A new camp managed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to house 11,000 people opened to the south-west of the city in May. Assistance is being provided in camps and at out-of-camp locations, including in returnee and host communities in eastern Mosul and in accessible neighbourhoods of western Mosul. Since mid-October, 1.5 million people have received emergency response packages of food, water and hygiene items. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and its partners continued to transport 6.3 million litres of water into neighbourhoods in eastern and western Mosul. The Mine Action Service of the Secretariat continued to assess the threat of explosive hazards and to clear explosive hazards in return areas.

58. From 1 March to 4 June, WHO provided technical and logistical support to clinically manage 192 patients, including women and children diagnosed with symptoms consistent with exposure to toxic agents. Four people have died. On

12 June, an outbreak of a food-borne illness occurred in Hasan Shami U2 camp, which accommodates over 7,000 displaced people from Mosul. According to health authorities, 825 people were affected; 638 people were referred to various health facilities and 386 people were admitted to hospitals in Erbil. The directorates of health in Erbil and Ninawa, with the support of health partners, responded swiftly and most of the affected people recovered quickly. Following the incident, authorities and humanitarian partners have taken steps to strengthen the coordination of food distribution to displaced people.

59. The Ministry of Health, with support from WHO and UNICEF, conducted a polio immunization campaign in May, reaching more than 61,300 children, aged five years or younger, in Ninawa, Erbil and Dahuk. Authorities continued to provide primary health services, including reproductive health and nutrition services, in emergency sites and camps in conflict-affected governorates, with support from WHO, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund and other partners.

60. Displacement from ISIL-controlled areas continues, including from Tall Afar, Hawija and Anbar, in smaller numbers. More than 20,000 people in Anbar have made the 500 km journey from Qa'im city to the Kilo 18 transit site between January and June. The humanitarian presence is low in Anbar governorate. No partners are operating west of Hit. This is compromising the speed of the needed response.

61. Returns continued across Iraq. More than 1.8 million people have returned to their homes in retaken areas, half of them in Anbar. Nearly 180,000 people have returned to eastern Mosul and to accessible areas of the west. Returnees are often vulnerable and continue to require humanitarian and protection assistance as people rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Once the Mosul operation concludes, the return of displaced people to their home areas will become an important and sensitive undertaking. Principled and needs-based humanitarian assistance will be required to help ensure that returns are safe, dignified and voluntary.

62. During the reporting period, the United Nations Development Programme Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization continued to expand. By June 2017, more than 1,000 projects were under way or had been completed in 23 liberated towns and districts in Anbar, Ninawa, Salah al-Din, Diyala and Kirkuk governorates. Using fast-track procedures, the Funding Facility is implementing more than 230 projects in eastern Mosul, including rehabilitation of water systems, the electricity grid and sewage facilities. Generators have been provided to Mosul University to enable 10,000 students to take their exams and thousands of people are working on public schemes, and thus earning incomes to support their families. The road from western Mosul to the Al-Athbah hospital has been restored to allow ambulances to pass quickly. Several additional projects are focused on repairing severely damaged components of the electricity grid, water and sewage networks and transport infrastructure. In the Ninawa plains, more than 150 projects are under way to support minority communities. Stabilization efforts are continuing in Fallujah and Ramadi, and will accelerate in parts of Diyala. Following successful pilots, initiatives to help women-headed households restart their lives and to help destitute families to repair damaged homes have been added to the Funding Facility.

63. In support of stabilization and humanitarian action, the Mine Action Service continued to work with the Iraqi authorities to identify, mark, clear and remove unexploded ordinance and improvised explosive devices. The Mine Action Service also worked with the authorities to help non-governmental organizations obtain accreditation, and to consider options on restricted use of explosives for demolitions.

64. The post-Mosul recovery and resilience programme made significant progress. Coordination mechanisms have been established with government counterparts for each of the eight components and framing papers are being written. The recovery and resilience programme is being designed to support the Government's new five-year national development plan, its 10-year reconstruction plan and its poverty reduction strategy, which is envisioned as a mechanism for transitioning from humanitarian action and stabilization to the Government's social protection net. The technical working group helping to develop the poverty reduction strategy, which includes members of the United Nations country team and the World Bank, met from 26 to 30 June in Beirut.

65. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Oxfam conducted a gender and conflict analysis of ISIL-affected communities. The study found that in many areas radical gender norms have been introduced, including strict separation of the sexes in public spaces and rules about attire. Women in ISIL-affected areas played roles protecting their families. There are reported shifts in household dynamics, which could serve to help women resume paid work and increase their decision-making role at home and in communities. The study uncovered pressures on men who refused to join ISIL, including loss of jobs, closure of businesses and restrictions on movement. UNAMI and the United Nations country team are using these insights to shape their recovery, resilience and reconciliation engagement.

E. Security and operational issues

66. The United Nations in Iraq continues to work in a high risk and fluid security environment to implement its programmes and activities based on programme criticality. Humanitarian assistance and stabilization needs have consistently increased, as more areas have been liberated from ISIL. Ninawa governorate and in particular Mosul remain at the centre of the conflict, resulting in a large number of displacements and increasing humanitarian needs. Meanwhile, asymmetric attacks by ISIL against security forces in Diyala, Salah al-Din and west Anbar governorates continued. Baghdad has recorded numerous asymmetric attacks in the form of improvised explosive device detonations in public places such as markets and commercial areas, resulting in high numbers of civilian casualties. Security advisories and temporary restrictions were put in place as precautionary measures. Despite the security challenges, the United Nations and its partners remain proactively engaged in delivering programmes and activities. The Humanitarian Support Cell of the Department of Safety and Security of the Secretariat, based in Erbil, has facilitated 49 very high risk and 485 high residual risk missions, in support of United Nations humanitarian programmes and activities from October 2016 to June 2017. The United Nations Security Management System in Iraq maintains close coordination with the host Government and appropriate security measures for United Nations operations remain in place.

67. Construction and renovation in the integrated United Nations compound in Baghdad continued. In January, 57 new accommodation units were added in Baghdad and 79 new accommodation units are projected to be completed in July 2017. Another 116 new accommodation units are scheduled for completion by August 2018 and planning has commenced for 250 additional office spaces. The renovation of infrastructure, offices and other facilities is ongoing. The Mission reduced its carbon footprint by implementing new measures to minimize solid waste and by changing lighting and air conditioning fixtures into energy-saving alternatives. The Mission started producing 240 kWs of renewable energy on 28 February 2017, through a photovoltaic farm.

IV. Observations

68. I congratulate the people of Iraq on the recovery of Mosul from ISIL. I applaud their courage, determination and perseverance in standing up against terrorism. The continuous, significant advances against ISIL are ample proof of what Iraqis can achieve when they reach across sectarian and other divides and work collectively for the future of their country. I pay tribute to the security forces and civilians who have made sacrifices in that fight, and I commend the role played by Iraq's international partners. Despite these momentous victories, the next stage requires continued dedication and resolve. The ultimate defeat of ISIL can only be secured through a long-term process that improves governance, provides better services, installs appropriate security arrangements for all communities, ensures justice and accountability and promotes reconciliation.

69. Iraqi political and community leaders have continued to engage constructively with my Special Representative on achieving a national settlement. I welcome their commitment. The Iraqi people need inclusive solutions to overcome the challenges they have faced over the past decades. In coordination with the Government, the United Nations will accelerate its efforts towards reconciliation and a national settlement.

70. I welcome grassroots initiatives that bolster the national reconciliation process, such as forums on the theme "Iraq: youth and coexistence" and round tables on the theme "Iraq after conflict", which UNAMI facilitated. I urge Iraqi political leaders to continue engaging with youth, women, civil society and minority representatives, in recognition of the role they need to play in advancing an inclusive national settlement. UNAMI will support initiatives that promote sustainability and local ownership and reinforce the momentum towards national and societal reconciliation.

71. Less than 10 months remain until the next elections for the Council of Representatives, which are constitutionally scheduled to take place no later than May 2018. Insufficient progress has been made to date to prepare for the provincial and district council elections, currently scheduled for September 2017. I would like to emphasize the importance of holding periodic, inclusive, transparent and credible elections according to the Constitution and law of the country, including in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, that reflect the will of the people. I call on Iraqi leaders to make the necessary decisions in due time and to communicate them to the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Iraqi people. I urge the Council of Representatives to expedite its consideration of amendments to the legal framework for elections, including with regard to the Law on Provincial and District Council Elections, the Law on the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Law on the Council of Representatives Elections. In addition, I call on the authorities to take immediate steps to expedite voter registration among the approximately 1.6 million displaced persons.

72. Although major military operations against ISIL are expected to conclude by the end of this year, the security environment will remain volatile, with continued terrorist attacks that target civilians and security forces in many parts of the country. Long-term comprehensive reform of the security sector remains essential so as to meet these challenges. The ongoing efforts to proceed with the implementation of a national strategy for security sector reform, led by the Iraqi National Security Council with support from international partners, including the United Nations, are welcomed.

73. I urge the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to reinforce the existing cooperation and coordination mechanisms between the Iraqi

security forces and the Peshmerga, especially those in Ninawa governorate in places such as Sinjar district. I am concerned about reports indicating a proliferation of local armed groups without proper government oversight. Inclusive and effective security arrangements must immediately be put in place in these liberated areas, with local authorities assisted by central structures taking on the responsibility for security. Failure to address this issue properly would increase the risk of a new confrontation emerging in the post-ISIL era.

74. I reiterate my call for determined actions by the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to resolve all outstanding issues between them. Dialogue leading to constructive compromises and mutually acceptable and sustainable solutions is essential. The end of major anti-ISIL operations has already brought to the fore outstanding issues from the past, with new issues related to the terrorist project by ISIL and the fight against it. If these outstanding issues are not addressed through negotiations, their latent potential to create crisis and conflict may manifest itself and undermine stability and security. This, in particular, includes the issues of disputed boundaries and territories, implementation of article 140 of the Constitution, including Kirkuk and its unresolved status, the independence referendum, as well as the voluntary and unhindered return of displaced persons under conditions of security. Unilateral steps, especially those that do not conform to the Constitution and laws of Iraq and the Kurdistan region of Iraq, would escalate the situation and lead to tensions and crisis, as well as create conditions for the re-emergence of violent extremist groups.

75. In the light of these concerns, I take note of the announced intention of the Kurdistan Regional Government and some local authorities to hold a referendum not only in the Kurdistan region of Iraq but also in some of the areas disputed between Baghdad and Erbil, including Kirkuk. I also take note of the statement by Prime Minister Al-Abadi that the time is not right for such a referendum, notwithstanding his respect for the aspirations of all Iraqi governorates. The positive momentum of the joint fight against ISIL, as well as the precious gains made through enormous sacrifices, may be at risk without a results-oriented dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil that should start without delay. I strongly hope that both sides will remain committed to their declared objective of resolving outstanding issues through constructive talks.

76. I call on the Council of Representatives and the Government to accelerate the adoption of key outstanding legislation, including the legal basis for the distribution of oil revenues, the Federation Council Law and the Components' Rights Law, and to decide on proposed amendments to other important legislation, such as the Justice and Accountability Law. I note that elected institutions have a special responsibility to measure up to the expectations of the Iraqi people and to promote confidence in the democratic process.

77. In the post-ISIL period, improved service delivery and good governance will be even more critical. This will require strong determination by Iraqi decision makers, at the national and local levels, to work together to improve conditions for the Iraqi population. Rampant corruption, which is a recurrent concern for most Iraqis, needs to be addressed through decisive and timely interventions.

78. Armed conflict, terrorism and acts of violence continue to take a terrible toll in terms of loss of civilian lives and injuries. Women, children and other vulnerable groups continue to disproportionately suffer from the consequences of the conflict. The situation in Mosul remains of concern. ISIL has continued to target civilians in liberated areas, including through shelling, and has continued to punish civilians for allegedly trying to flee areas under its control. I also note reports of the targeting of civilians in Ninawa by pro-government tribal groups, including through forced

evictions. If proven, such concerning actions would weaken the rule of law in retaken areas and work against the return of displaced persons to all liberated areas. This could undermine stability and security in the country. I call on the Government of Iraq to step up efforts to ensure accountability for atrocity crimes committed in the context of the current conflict in Iraq in accordance with Iraq's international obligations and international norms and standards. The United Nations stands ready to increase its technical assistance to the Government of Iraq to strengthen its capacity to collect information and evidence on atrocity crimes, adapt its national legislation and try those responsible for such crimes.

79. Once again, I stress that all necessary actions must be taken to enable the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced persons, including from minority communities, and to protect fully their civil and political rights, including their enfranchisement in the forthcoming elections. This should be done through proper coordination with all Iraqi security forces, including local police, to create an atmosphere free from fear and intimidation, without retribution, retaliation and forced evictions. I encourage the Government to continue its efforts to put in place effective governance and security arrangements in Ninawa and other liberated governorates.

80. I am pleased to say that on 19 June I received a letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, expressing the wish of the Government of Iraq that the mandate of UNAMI be extended for a period of one year through 31 July 2018, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1770 (2007). In addition, I am pleased to report that on 29 June the Government of Iraq and the Secretariat reached agreement on the texts of the memorandums of understanding and exchange of letters required for concluding the implementation of Security Council resolution 1958 (2010).

81. Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my Special Representative, Ján Kubiš, and the staff of the United Nations in Iraq for their unstinting and courageous efforts in implementing the United Nations mandate in Iraq under very challenging circumstances.

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Security Council

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The Security Council,

Recalling all its previous relevant resolutions on Iraq, in particular 1500 (2003), 1546 (2004), 1557 (2004), 1619 (2005), 1700 (2006), 1770 (2007), 1830 (2008), 1883 (2009), 1936 (2010), 2001 (2011), 2061 (2012), 2110 (2013), 2169 (2014), 2233 (2015), and 2299 (2016), and resolution 2107 (2013) on the situation between Iraq and Kuwait,

Reaffirming the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Iraq,

Emphasizing the importance of the stability and security of Iraq for the people of Iraq, the region, and the international community,

Reiterating its grave concern at the current security situation in Iraq as a result of the continuing presence of and threat by terrorist groups, in particular the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh) and associated armed groups, involving violations of international humanitarian law, heavy civilian casualties, including women and children, the cumulative displacement of more than 5.3 million Iraqi civilians, the systematic use of sexual violence and sexual enslavement, persecution of individuals on the basis of their religion, belief or ethnicity, and the threat to the safety of journalists, media professionals, and associated personnel, *condemning* the attacks perpetrated by these terrorist groups and associated armed groups against the people of Iraq in an attempt to destabilize the country and region, *expressing* its sympathies to the families of all victims of terror attacks, and *further reiterating* its commitment to Iraq's security and territorial integrity,

Noting that the presence of ISIL (Da'esh) on Iraq's sovereign territory is a major threat to Iraq's future, *underscoring* that the only way to address this threat is for all Iraqis to work together by addressing needs in the security as well as the political realm, *stressing* the long-term solution to the instability will require the political leadership of Iraq to make decisions that will unite the country, and *emphasizing* the importance of the international community supporting Iraq in this regard,

Calling on all political entities to intensify efforts to overcome divisions and work together in an inclusive and timely political process aimed at reaching consensus on a single vision for reconciliation and strengthening Iraq's national unity, sovereignty and independence and for Iraq's leaders to engage in dialogue that would contribute to finding a viable and sustainable solution to the country's

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current challenges, *welcoming* the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in this regard, and *reaffirming* its belief that through its democratic institutions, in cooperation with Iraqi society, the Government of Iraq can work to address the challenges facing the country for the benefit of all Iraqis,

Underscoring the need for all segments of the Iraqi population to participate in the political process, in inclusive political dialogue, including through the equal participation of women, and in the economic and social life of Iraq, to refrain from statements and actions which could aggravate tensions, to reach a comprehensive solution on the fair distribution of resources, to promote stability, to develop a just and fair solution for the nation's disputed internal boundaries, and to work to strengthen national unity, including through cooperation between the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government in the spirit of genuine partnership, and *stressing* the importance of a comprehensive and inclusive Iraqi-led political process to support dialogue for all those who renounce violence, have no links to international terrorist organizations, including ISIL (Da'esh), and respect the Constitution,

Encouraging the Government of Iraq to continue strengthening governance, pursuing more substantive reforms, particularly economic and institutional reforms to improve the standard of living for all Iraqis, including by countering corruption, promoting human rights and the rule of law, improving the situation of women and girls, especially those impacted by ISIL (Da'esh), improving security and public order, including through security sector reform, and combating terrorism and sectarian violence, *reiterating* its support to the people and the Government of Iraq in their efforts to build a secure, stable, federal, united and democratic nation, based on the rule of law and respect for human rights, and *strongly emphasizing* the need for the Government of Iraq to conduct, in an independent manner, full, prompt, impartial and effective investigations and hold to account those responsible for violations or abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law,

Emphasizing the need to continue efforts to promote international and regional cooperation aimed at supporting Iraq both in its reconciliation and political dialogue and in its fight against ISIL (Da'esh), and to prevent ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida, and associated individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities designated by the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, from using the territories of Iraq and neighbouring States to carry out violence or other illicit acts to destabilize Iraq and the region,

Recognizing that terrorism poses a threat to international peace and security and that countering this threat requires collective efforts on national, regional and international levels on the basis of respect for international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, and in this context, *welcoming* the efforts of the Government of Iraq and its partners to counter ISIL (Da'esh), hold it accountable for its abuses, and return stability throughout the country, and also *welcoming* the Government of Iraq's successes in liberating Sinjar, Bayji, Tikrit, Ramadi, Hit, Fallujah, and Mosul, marking major steps in the continuing international effort to defeat ISIL (Da'esh),

Reaffirming that all parties, including armed groups and militias, must respect human rights and abide by all applicable obligations under international humanitarian law, including those to protect the civilian population, including civilians displaced from and returning to areas liberated from ISIL (Da'esh), by which both official Iraqi forces and Member States that assist them must also abide, and while acknowledging legitimate security measures to identify members of ISIL (Da'esh), *calling* on all parties to immediately release any arbitrarily or unlawfully

detained persons, *emphasizing* that those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights, including those involving detainees and sexual and gender-based violence, must be held accountable, *welcoming* the establishment by Prime Minister of Iraq Haider al-Abadi of a committee to investigate reported violations and abuses, including reports of missing men and boys from Fallujah and other territories liberated from ISIS, and *stressing* the need for all such allegations, wherever they occur, to be immediately and comprehensively investigated and, as appropriate, prosecuted,

Emphasizing that all parties should take all feasible steps to ensure the protection of affected civilians, including children, women and members of religious and ethnic minority groups, and should create conditions conducive to the voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons or local integration of internally displaced persons, particularly in areas newly-liberated from ISIL (Da'esh), including over 820,000 persons estimated to be currently displaced from Mosul, *stressing* respect for the rights of internally displaced persons, without discrimination, including in the context of resettlement, returns or local integration, as well as for the freedom of movement, *reiterating* its gratitude to the host communities, *underscoring* that host communities should provide access to safe areas for internally displaced persons and that those who commit violations and abuses against them should be held accountable, *welcoming* commitments and encouraging continued efforts of the Government of Iraq for the relief of internally displaced persons, refugees and returnees, *noting* the important role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, based on its mandate, in providing continued advice and support to the Government of Iraq, in coordination with UNAMI, on these issues, and *encouraging* the Government of Iraq to continue working with UNAMI and humanitarian agencies to ensure the delivery of humanitarian relief to all those in need,

Emphasizing the importance of continuing efforts to support stabilization and long-term sustainable development, particularly in areas liberated from ISIL (Da'esh), *urging* the Government of Iraq and its partners to accelerate such efforts in order to create the conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons, *welcoming* efforts of Member States to support the Government of Iraq and its partners as they work to stabilize these areas, *encouraging* Member States to continue to support stabilization and development, including through the United Nations, *recognizing* the threat of hazardous explosive devices, *welcoming* efforts by member states to support the Government of Iraq and its partners in addressing the need to provide risk education, appropriate threat assessments, and conduct clearance of areas of such devices, and *encouraging* Member States to increase their support for ongoing stabilization efforts,

Strongly emphasizing the urgency of addressing humanitarian challenges confronting the Iraqi people, *stressing* the need to intensify planning and implementation of a coordinated response and to provide adequate resources to address these challenges, *calling* for an intensification of these efforts by all parties, *urging* all Member States to continue to fund United Nations and other humanitarian appeals, *encouraging* Member States to support the United Nations' humanitarian response in Iraq, working with the Government of Iraq, to assist all Iraqi individuals affected by the ongoing conflict, and *commending* the efforts of Member States that have contributed to the humanitarian effort,

Urging all those concerned to allow full, unimpeded access for humanitarian personnel to all people in need, to make available, as far as possible, all necessary facilities for their operations, to allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance, to promote the safety, security, and freedom of movement of humanitarian personnel

and United Nations staff, its associated personnel and their assets, and also to respect and protect medical personnel and medical transport and facilities,

Urging the Government of Iraq to continue to promote and protect human rights and also to consider additional steps to support the Independent High Commission for Human Rights in carrying out its mandate, *encouraging* the Government of Iraq to reinvigorate its efforts to promote and protect the rights of women and reaffirming its resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013) and 2242 (2015) on women, peace, and security and *reiterating* the need for the full, equal, and effective participation of women, *reaffirming* the key role women can play in re-establishing the fabric of society, *stressing* the need for their full political participation, including in upcoming elections and the Independent High Electoral Commission, stabilization planning, political decision making, local and national reconciliation and peace processes, and *expressing* concern about the lack of implementation, including funding, of Iraq's National Action Plan of 2014 in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000) as well as the lack of a national entity responsible for its implementation,

Expressing strong concern at continuing violations and abuses committed against children, including those involving the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, unlawful detention, abductions, and attacks against schools and hospitals, and *urging* all parties to conflict to take all necessary measures to end and prevent such violations and abuses, recalling in this regard its resolutions 1379 (2001), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011) and 2225 (2015), and taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/2015/852) and *welcoming* parties' continued implementation of the conclusions of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in S/AC.51/2016/2,

Expressing grave concern that the violent extremism and terrorism perpetrated by ISIL (Da'esh) in Iraq has systematically targeted women and children, especially those from minority communities, and that ISIL (Da'esh) has committed serious human rights abuses, and violations of international humanitarian law against all people, particularly women and children, including those involving murder, kidnapping, hostage-taking, suicide bombings, enslavement, sale into or otherwise forced marriage, human trafficking, rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence, *recalling* in this regard resolution 2231 (2016) and the Joint Communiqué between the United Nations and the Government of Iraq on Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (2016) and *further expressing grave concern* at the recruitment and use of children by ISIL (Da'esh) and other armed groups in violation of international law,

Condemning the destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq particularly by ISIL (Da'esh), including targeted destruction of religious sites and objects and *noting with concern* that ISIL (Da'esh) and other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida, are generating income from engaging directly or indirectly in the looting and smuggling of cultural heritage items from archaeological sites, museums, libraries, archives, and other sites in Iraq, which is being used to support their recruitment efforts and strengthen their operational capability to organize and carry out terrorist attacks, and *recalling* in this regard the measures set out in resolution 2347 (2017),

Expressing its readiness to sanction further individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities who are supporting ISIL (Da'esh), *strongly condemning* any engagement in direct or indirect trade in oil and refined oil products, modular refineries and related material, other natural resources, and antiquities from Iraq involving these terrorist groups, as well as drug trafficking, consistent with

resolution 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015), as well as human trafficking, sale of women and girls, and forced marriage, and *emphasizing* that such engagement constitutes financial support for such terrorists and may lead to further sanctions listings by the Committee,

Reaffirming that all States shall ensure that any person who participates in the financing, planning, preparation, or perpetration of terrorist acts or in supporting terrorist acts is brought to justice,

Recognizing that the situation that now exists in Iraq is significantly different from that which existed at the time of the adoption of resolution 661 (1990), and *further recognizing* the importance of Iraq achieving international standing equal to that which it held prior to the adoption of resolution 661 (1990),

Welcoming the political, military and financial assistance to the Government of Iraq from Member States, and *encouraging* such assistance to continue and expand,

Stressing the importance of the United Nations, in particular UNAMI, in advising, supporting and assisting the Iraqi people, including civil society, and the Government of Iraq to strengthen democratic institutions, advance inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation according to the Constitution, ensure reconciliation efforts are coordinated, facilitate regional dialogue, develop processes acceptable to the Government of Iraq to resolve disputed internal boundaries, aid youth and vulnerable groups, monitor and encourage the protection of civilians, particularly refugees and internally displaced persons, including those in transit, and promote the full participation of women in political and peace processes and institutions, gender equality and the protection of human rights, children and youth, and vulnerable groups, *highlighting* the need for specific information and practical recommendations related to the gender dimensions of the conflict and on the implementation of women, peace and security agenda in Iraq, and the continued provision of dedicated expertise to facilitate coordinated implementation of monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, and *emphasizing* the importance of the United Nations, in particular UNAMI, in prioritizing advice, support, and assistance to the Iraqi people, including civil society, and the Government of Iraq to achieve these goals,

Encouraging UNAMI to continue to revise and prioritize its tasks in full consultation with the Government of Iraq and in response to its needs and the evolving situation in the country,

Expressing deep gratitude to all the United Nations staff in Iraq for their courageous and tireless efforts, and commending the leadership and good offices role of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, Ján Kubiš,

1. *Decides* to extend the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) until 31 July 2018;

2. *Decides* further that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNAMI, at the request of the Government of Iraq, and taking into account the letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq to the Secretary-General (S/2017/518), shall continue to pursue their mandate as stipulated in resolution 2299 (2016); and *recalls* the provisions of resolution 2107 (2013);

3. *Recognizes* that security of United Nations personnel is essential for UNAMI to carry out its work for the benefit of the people of Iraq and *calls upon* the Government of Iraq to continue to provide security and logistical support to the United Nations presence in Iraq;

4. *Welcomes* the contributions of Member States in providing UNAMI with the financial, logistical, and security resources and support that it needs to fulfil its

mission and *calls upon* Member States to continue to provide UNAMI with sufficient resources and support;

5. *Expresses* its intention to review the mandate of UNAMI in 12 months or sooner, if requested by the Government of Iraq;

6. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Council every three months on the progress made towards the fulfilment of all UNAMI's responsibilities;

7. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General to conduct, by 15 October 2017, an independent, external assessment of the structure and staffing of the Mission, related resources, priorities, and areas in which it has comparative advantages and synergies with other United Nations entities, in order to ensure that the Mission and United Nations Country Team are configured to most appropriately and efficiently fulfil mandated tasks;

8. *Decides* to remain seized of the matter.

United Nations S/2017/594

Security Council

Distr.: General
11 July 2017

Original: English

Letter dated 11 July 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to Security Council resolution 2353 (2017), adopted by the Council on 24 May 2017, by which the Council decided to extend until 30 June 2018 the mandate of the Panel of Experts as set out in paragraph 12 of resolution 2290 (2016).

Accordingly, I wish to inform you that, after consulting with the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2206 (2015) concerning South Sudan, I have appointed the following experts:

- Mr. Andrews Atta-Asamoah, regional issues (Ghana)
- Mr. Andrei Kolmakov, natural resources/finance (Russian Federation)
- Ms. Anna Oosterlinck, humanitarian affairs (Belgium)
- Mr. Klem Ryan, arms (New Zealand)
- Mr. Colin Thomas-Jensen, armed groups (United States of America)

I have designated Mr. Klem Ryan to serve as Coordinator of the Panel of Experts.

I would be grateful if you could bring this matter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**

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United Nations A/71/981–S/2017/595

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
14 July 2017
English
Original: Arabic

General Assembly
Seventy-first session
Agenda item 108
Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Security Council
Seventy-second year

Identical letters dated 11 July 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, and further to previous letters from the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council regarding the repeated aggressions the forces of the Turkish regime have committed against the sovereignty and territory of Syria, I should like to convey to you the following information:

On 1 July 2017, the army of the Turkish regime deployed its forces all along the border inside Syrian territory north of the Afrin area. The Turkish regime's army also brought in new pickup trucks equipped with machine guns and a number of new vehicles that have never before been seen in Syrian territory. The Turkish regime forces distributed those vehicles to armed terrorist organizations that are active in the area, including the Nusrah Front, Free Police, Ahrar al-Sham and Turkish Police terrorist organizations. Those vehicles are to be used in an attack against the Afrin area that will be led by the Nusrah Front terrorist organization (QDe.137).

One day earlier, on 30 June 2017, armed terrorist groups warned the people of Dana town and surrounding villages in the Idlib countryside that, as agreed with Turkey, they must empty the town and surrounding villages of civilians, with a view to ensuring the security of a military base that the Turkish regime will build in the Jabal Sim'an area for the purpose of cutting off the road to the Idlib countryside. Reports and assurances are circulating among armed terrorist groups supported by the Turkish regime that the regime considers the security of Idlib governorate to be essential to the security of Turkey.

Meanwhile, it has been reported that the presence of Turkish regime forces in the area has led to a dispute and a rift between the Nur al-Din al-Zanki Battalions and Levant Liberation Organization terrorist groups.

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I should be grateful if these identical letters could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 108, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mounzer **Mounzer**
Minister Plenipotentiary
Chargé d'affaires a.i

United Nations S/2017/596

Security Council

Distr.: General
11 July 2017

Original: English

Fifteenth report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013)

I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013), covers developments pertaining to the issues of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives, since the issuance of the previous report of 28 April 2017 (S/2017/371).

2. On 20 April 2017, in Baghdad, my Deputy Special Representative for Iraq for Political Affairs, György Busztin, met with the Undersecretary of Bilateral Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Nizar al-Khairallah. The meeting highlighted an improvement in the relationship between Iraq and Kuwait, which has helped to strengthen cooperation and coordination on the file on missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, and emphasized the excellent cooperation and coordination between the Iraqi Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence and between the Iraqi authorities and their counterparts, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Kuwaiti National Committee for Missing Persons and Prisoners of War Affairs, which have been instrumental in moving the work forward. My Deputy Special Representative encouraged the Ministry to continue its close coordination with relevant Iraqi authorities on these issues and expressed hope that the implementation of a holistic approach, which includes more efficient coordination and information sharing among all the entities involved, work with the witnesses and the use of modern technology at the excavation sites, can lead to tangible results. Taking into consideration the positive results and the significant increase in the number of witnesses coming forward, he also encouraged relevant Iraqi institutions to continue the widely distributed public announcement campaigns. Mr. Al-Khairallah expressed the unwavering and sincere commitment of the Government of Iraq and its dedication to continuing to make the efforts necessary to achieving specific progress in bringing the file to a close. He also welcomed any suggestions or proposals from the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) that could help to achieve progress.

3. On 3 May, in Kuwait, my Special Representative met with the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Khaled al-Hamad al-Sabah, who underlined the good relations that have developed between the two States over the past years and expressed the readiness of Kuwait to support and assist Iraq in its efforts to regain stability and security in the post-Islamic State

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in Iraq and the Levant era. Sheikh Al-Sabah also highlighted the great humanitarian significance of the missing persons and property file and urged a stronger commitment and enhanced efforts from the Government of Iraq in trying to locate Kuwaiti and third-country nationals, missing Kuwaiti property and the national archives. In addition, he reaffirmed the readiness of Kuwait to support the efforts of Iraq financially and technically through the tripartite mechanism.

4. On 8 May, in Baghdad, my Deputy Special Representative met with the Ambassador of Kuwait to Iraq, Salem Ghassab Mohammed al-Zamanan, who reiterated his wish to see more progress on the ground to close the file after 26 years, highlighting the importance of Iraq redoubling its efforts to achieve the desired results, while acknowledging at the same time the continuous commitment of Iraq to the issue.

5. On 14 June, the Security Council issued a press statement on Iraq-Kuwait, specifically on the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives, following its consultation on the previous report. In the statement, Council members welcomed the strong bilateral relations between the two countries and commended the continued support of the Government of Kuwait for Iraq in its effort to achieve stability. The members of the Council, while recognizing the considerable challenges facing Iraq at this time, called upon the Government of Iraq to continue its efforts to achieve tangible progress with respect to returning all missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals, or their remains, in addition to returning Kuwaiti property, including the national archives.

6. On 20 June, the Prime Minister of Iraq, Haider al-Abadi, visited Kuwait as part of his regional tour, in an effort to foster regional cooperation, promote development opportunities and support security and stability in the region. Mr. Al-Abadi stressed that relations between Iraq and Kuwait had developed significantly and that the objective of his visit was to maintain that relationship with the Government of Kuwait and expand it further in security, economic, agricultural and commercial fields.

II. Recent activities with regard to the repatriation and return of all Kuwaiti and third-country nationals, or their remains

7. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Defence of Iraq continued to gather information on a number of potential burial locations, including the Jahra' and naval base sites in Kuwait and the Radwaniyah, Khamisiyah and Salman Pak sites in Iraq. As part of those efforts, the Ministry has been investigating information received from witnesses and cross-checking it with other government institutions in an effort to verify claims and identify exact burial sites.

8. From 11 to 18 April, excavation work was carried out by the technical team of the Ministry of Defence of Iraq on the potential burial site in Khamisiyah, during which eight coordinates were determined and 185 probing trenches dug. No human remains were found.

9. From 21 to 27 April, the technical team of the Ministry undertook excavation works on a potential burial site in Karbala' province, during the course of which 80 probing trenches were dug. The work did not yield conclusive results. In addition, the team carried out exploratory and field survey missions in the region, specifying 45 coordinates for further consideration.

10. On 3 May, in Kuwait, my Special Representative met with the members of the Kuwaiti National Committee for Missing Persons and Prisoners of War Affairs, who

expressed their appreciation for the ongoing efforts of Iraq and reiterated their wish to see more tangible results on the file. The Committee members noted that they had encouraged regular information sharing with the Ministry of Defence of Iraq, in particular between the tripartite mechanism sessions, as a means of ensuring appropriate follow-up.

11. On 7 May, the technical team of the Ministry carried out an exploratory mission in a potential burial location in Samawah province in the presence of the ICRC Forensic Adviser. During the mission, three coordinates were indicated for the future excavation works.

12. On 9 May, in Baghdad, my Deputy Special Representative met with the Head of the International Organizations Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Sundus Omar Ali, and advised her that the Government of Iraq should fully cooperate with the tripartite mechanism at all levels and utilize new technology in the search for the missing.

13. On 15 May, the Ministry of Defence of Iraq issued a public call for witnesses that was broadcast on Iraqi satellite television channels, inviting all those with information on missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals to come forward.

14. On 22 May, for the first time in 14 years, Iraq hosted the Technical Subcommittee of the tripartite mechanism, which held its ninety-ninth session in Baghdad. UNAMI attended the session in an observer capacity. All the members expressed their appreciation for the commitment and efforts of Iraq with regard to the file and for successfully hosting the meeting in Baghdad, the first under the auspices of an elected national Government. The Iraqi delegation stated that the country's highest authorities were fully committed to this international and humanitarian obligation. It also expressed its intent to continue to work on the file until it reached positive results, in order to alleviate the suffering of the families of the missing. The ICRC and Kuwaiti delegations thanked UNAMI for its continuous commitment to and support for the tripartite mechanism.

15. Discussing the work undertaken by the Ministry of Defence of Iraq on the Khamisiyah site during the reporting period, all parties highlighted the importance of the site and agreed to keep it a priority. The delegation of Kuwait also emphasized that activities relating to the Khamisiyah site should follow a three-track approach, namely, efforts to reach witnesses, exploration and excavation missions, and finding new technologies to enhance the search, and should continue in parallel. The ICRC delegation updated the members on the progress of the in-depth scientific review project, which has encompassed a review of the archives, the gathering of documents and the analysis of data. The first draft of the report will have been ready by August 2017 and will have been preceded by bilateral consultations with the members of the tripartite mechanism.

16. On 24 May, in Baghdad, UNAMI attended the forty-fourth session of the Tripartite Commission in its observer capacity. The Iraqi delegation reiterated the priority that the file represented for the Government of Iraq and its interest in the activities of the Commission, underlining both the moral obligation to the families of the victims and its commitment to further strengthening brotherly relations with Kuwait. The Kuwaiti delegation expressed its full understanding of the challenges faced by the Government of Iraq and highlighted the importance of continuing the team efforts, collaboration, exchange of information, assistance and support among the members of the tripartite mechanism. The delegation also praised the initiative to undertake an in-depth scientific review as a useful and practical measure intended to enhance field search efforts, and the public announcement campaigns broadcast by the Ministry of Defence of Iraq, which had resulted in an increase in the number of people coming forward to provide information.

17. During the meeting, the observer status of UNAMI was renewed, with the delegations expressing gratitude and appreciation for the Mission's efforts on and support of the humanitarian process. The meeting participants reconfirmed their dedication and commitment and the determination of all members to pursue the common goal of resolving the remaining cases of missing persons. It was suggested that new technology be used and a more proactive approach in making contacts with international experts and other countries or organizations dealing with this issue be taken in an effort to share experiences and make further progress on the file.

18. On 8 June, in Baghdad, my Deputy Special Representative met with the Deputy of the General Legal Adviser and Head of the Technical Committee in charge of the file on missing Kuwaiti persons and property at the Ministry of Defence of Iraq, Brigadier General Hazem Qassem Majid. My Deputy Special Representative commended the Government of Iraq for hosting the tripartite meetings and welcomed the positive and fruitful atmosphere that prevailed throughout the sessions. Brigadier General Majid underlined the continuous commitment of the Government of Iraq regarding the file and the detailed efforts of the Ministry of Defence of Iraq to reach potential witnesses by collaborating with other relevant Iraqi institutions.

19. In a press statement of 14 June following the previous report, the members of the Security Council noted the limited progress made on this issue recently and expressed their regret that no case of missing Kuwaiti persons had been solved and no human remains had been exhumed during the previous 12 years. They recognized the important steps that had recently been taken to reinvigorate the file of missing Kuwaiti persons and third-country nationals and were encouraged by the commitment of the Ministry of Defence of Iraq, as evidenced by recent activities. The Council also expressed strong support for the perseverance of the members of the tripartite mechanism and its chair, ICRC, and encouraged Iraq and Kuwait to collaborate through that mechanism to achieve further tangible results. In that regard, the Council expressed support for my view that ascertaining the fate of missing persons and providing answers to their grieving families depend on steadfast commitment and relevant action and the adoption of new and innovative ways to move the file forward.

III. Recent activities with regard to the return of Kuwaiti property

20. On 20 April, during the meeting in Baghdad with the Undersecretary of Bilateral Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, my Deputy Special Representative took note of a huge volume of Kuwaiti books located in university libraries across Iraq and encouraged the Ministry to complete their cataloguing and to organize their official handover to the Government of Kuwait. Turning to the national archives, my Deputy Special Representative highlighted their paramount significance and reiterated the proposal of UNAMI on conducting a specialized campaign aimed at finding information on their possible location.

21. In its press statement of 14 June, the members of the Security Council strongly encouraged the Governments of Iraq and Kuwait to reconvene the Joint Property Committee every six months, as previously agreed.

IV. Observations

22. The hosting of the Technical Subcommittee and the Technical Committee meetings in Baghdad for the first time in 14 years marks another positive step towards a steady and continuous strengthening of bilateral relations between Iraq and Kuwait based on mutual respect, goodwill and collaboration between the two neighbouring countries. The understanding and support demonstrated by Kuwait towards Iraq, in particular with regard to the file, is praiseworthy, as is the resolve displayed by the Government of Iraq to fulfil its international, moral and humanitarian obligations and to reach tangible results. The lack of concrete positive outcomes remains a source of disappointment and frustration to both countries, however, in particular to the families of the missing. I echo the sentiments expressed during the latest tripartite mechanism meetings in Baghdad, which were also acknowledged by the Security Council in its statement of 14 June. The same sentiments apply to the missing property file, on which the Government of Iraq should be encouraged to make use of its increasingly positive relationship with Kuwait and continue to remain steadfast in this undertaking while redoubling its efforts.

23. I commend the Ministry of Defence of Iraq for its proactive efforts and practical measures aimed at finding new sources of information that could assist in locating potential burial sites, following up on and verifying witness statements and undertaking exploration and excavation works. During the past year, the Ministry has proved to be a dependable and reliable partner in this important humanitarian process. I encourage the Ministry to continue to work with the same resolve and determination to bring this file to a close in order to bring comfort to families who have lost their loved ones. I continue to stress the importance for the Government of Iraq of maintaining adequate institutional, financial, technical and other support to enable the continuation of activities relating to this important humanitarian endeavour.

24. I applaud the role, guidance and expertise of ICRC in supervising this process and its continuous commitment to the success of this humanitarian work. I commend the dedication of the members of the tripartite mechanism and their contributions to its activities, which have been crucial to maintaining the determination necessary to move the process forward. I remain convinced that reinvigorated efforts, new ideas and the multifaceted and comprehensive approach proposed at the tripartite mechanism meetings have the potential to bring a positive outcome in the common pursuit of finding the remains of those missing for more than 26 years.

25. With regard to missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives, I urge the Government of Iraq to bolster its efforts and activities.

26. I welcome the trust placed in UNAMI by the Governments of Iraq and Kuwait during this process. I reiterate the unwavering commitment of UNAMI, my Special Representative and my Deputy Special Representative to continuing to promote, support and facilitate the efforts of the Government of Iraq on the file on missing Kuwaiti persons and property.

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Security Council

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Letter dated 10 July 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

By paragraph 29 of its resolution 2339 (2017), the Security Council requested me to provide options for the elaboration of benchmarks to assess the measures of the arms embargo according to progress made in security sector reform, including with respect to the national defence and security forces of the Central African Republic and their needs, as well as additional information on the recommendation by the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic to establish an arms embargo working group, potentially within the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), including composition, tasks, functioning, resource requirements and implications with regard to the implementation of the Mission's mandate for such a working group, with reference to previous similar experiences in other United Nations peacekeeping missions.

In pursuance of the above request, the Secretariat, through a dedicated assessment team comprising representatives of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs, undertook a review of available information on the issue, taking into account feedback received during several rounds of consultations with relevant actors, including MINUSCA, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the Panel of Experts. The Secretariat also reviewed best practices and lessons learned on the monitoring of arms embargoes in the context of preparing my upcoming report on small arms and light weapons, in particular with respect to peacekeeping operations and special political missions with a mandate to monitor arms embargoes.

On the basis of that assessment, I hereby provide, for the consideration of the Security Council, possible options on the elaboration of benchmarks to assess the implementation of the arms embargo in the Central African Republic, as well as additional information regarding the establishment of a possible arms embargo working group.

Elaboration of benchmarks to assess arms embargo measures

The Security Council has requested assessments of arms embargoes and other sanctions measures in a number of cases. This was done in Somalia in 2014 (S/2014/243) and in Liberia in 2014 (S/2014/707) and 2015 (S/2015/590), as well as in connection with the situation in Guinea-Bissau in 2015 (S/2015/619) and 2016 (S/2016/720). Such assessments have proved to be a useful tool for the entire United Nations system for providing the Council with relevant input for its reviews of the overall sanctions regime and/or specific sanctions measures.

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Previous assessments of arms embargoes and other related sanctions measures have taken into account, among other factors, the status and relevance of the measures and their impact on the security situation in the country; their contribution to the peace process, ceasefire regimes or the cessation of hostilities agreements; the need for national legislative frameworks on weapons and ammunition management and weapons management systems; border control and customs issues; and the implementation of disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and security sector reform processes.

In the case of the Central African Republic, specific benchmarks have yet to be elaborated to reassess and/or adjust arms embargo measures. Several options for developing such benchmarks are presented below.

Option 1: Headquarters-based desk review

One option would involve a Headquarters-based desk review. Such a desk review would collect, organize and combine available information on existing lessons learned and my recent assessments on the design, implementation and monitoring of arms embargoes (see above). Those general findings would be considered together with the current analysis of arms embargo implementation in the Central African Republic. The results of the desk review may be used by the Security Council to elaborate a list of benchmarks against which the progress of implementation at the national level may be assessed. The desk review would take approximately one month to complete. While this review would be conducted in a fairly short time frame, it may not be able to provide an analysis comprehensive enough to reflect the full perspectives and concerns of international, regional and national actors based in Bangui.

Option 2: Desk review with Headquarters-based remote consultations with the field

Another option would be through a Headquarters-based desk review that would include videoconference and teleconference consultations with international, regional and national actors based in Bangui and in the region. These consultations would allow for a more comprehensive collection of information and perspectives from relevant actors in the Central African Republic to usefully complement the desk review. On the basis of the information gathered, both by the desk review and through consultations undertaken from New York, the Security Council may elaborate benchmarks against which progress at the national level in implementing the arms embargo may be assessed. Consultations would be conducted with representatives of the relevant Central African authorities, MINUSCA, the European Union Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic, the Panel of Experts and UNIDIR. This option would take an estimated two months to complete to allow for consultations among a wide range of relevant actors.

Option 3: Desk review with Headquarters-based remote consultations and field-based assessment mission

A third option would combine the Headquarters-based desk review and initial remote consultations with the field with a field-based assessment visit to the Central African Republic. The visit would allow for consultations with the widest possible range of national actors on the ground and would provide an opportunity to visit the weapons and ammunition storage facilities of the national defence and security forces. The visit would also identify national capacities to effectively manage weapons and ammunition stockpiles. The assessment team would include representatives of the Secretariat and MINUSCA and would consult the relevant national authorities (including the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior), the Mine Action Service, the European Union Military Training Mission, the Panel of Experts and UNIDIR. This option could be completed in an estimated three months.

Arms embargo monitoring

Notwithstanding the significant political milestones achieved since early 2016, including the holding of presidential and national elections, the security situation in the Central African Republic remains extremely fragile. The ongoing presence of armed groups and other armed spoilers continues to constitute the greatest threat to peace and stability, with the illicit transfer and availability of small arms and light weapons enabling combatants to continue to fight and to perpetuate the cycle of violence and its impact on civilians.

Despite the establishment of an arms embargo by the Security Council in December 2013, the illicit trafficking of weapons and ammunition into the Central African Republic has continued, as evidenced by the identification of trafficking routes from neighbouring States by the Panel of Experts and the seizure of weapons in violation of the embargo by MINUSCA. In its reports, the Panel has identified a number of weapons-trafficking routes into the country from several neighbouring States, such as Béma on the Ubangi River, bordering the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Tisi and Am Dafok in the north-east, close to the border with Chad and the Sudan. Recent weapons seizures by MINUSCA include 11,275 rounds of hunting ammunition and 136 machetes confiscated in Bangassou, Mbomou prefecture, on 11 April 2017.

The national capacity of the Central African Republic to prevent illicit arms trafficking is extremely limited. It lacks the operational capacity to inspect cargo entering by land, river and air, particularly given the challenges of monitoring a country of its size. In this context, the signing, on 14 February 2017, of Presidential Decree 17.069 on the creation of the National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons is a first step towards the operationalization of a national legislative framework on weapons and ammunition management, which should be supported by the international community, including through the provision of technical expertise.

Neighbouring States face their own challenges in terms of controlling their own borders and preventing weapons from entering the Central African Republic. According to the Panel of Experts, and as verified by MINUSCA, regional security mechanisms aimed at addressing transborder threats, including the tripartite force created by the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan, are initiatives to counter arms trafficking that may have an important role to play.

The mandate of MINUSCA with respect to its implementation of the arms embargo pursuant to resolution 2301 (2016) encompasses a range of activities, including monitoring the implementation of the embargo in cooperation with the Panel of Experts; inspecting, as it deems necessary and when appropriate without notice, all arms and related materiel regardless of location; and advising the authorities of the Central African Republic on efforts to keep armed groups from exploiting natural resources. MINUSCA is also authorized to seize and collect arms and any related materiel in the Central African Republic that violate the embargo and to record and dispose of such arms and related materiel as appropriate.

In areas where it is deployed, the Mission monitors entry points, illegal markets and networks for arms and ammunition trafficking and shares its findings with the Panel of Experts. Taking into account the tentative nature of available information, MINUSCA regularly seizes various types of weapons.

However, in addition to the physical limitations posed by the lack of infrastructure, the size of the country and its porous borders, MINUSCA does not have consistent and regular access to many areas of the country. Because the Mission cannot be deployed at all locations throughout the country, including in the proximity of possible arms trafficking routes, it is difficult to obtain solid evidence

of existing smuggling and/or trafficking routes and to identify the individuals and groups involved. The Mission is also therefore limited in its capacity to develop an accurate understanding of the arms trafficking situation. Nevertheless, efforts to increase aerial surveillance by MINUSCA and its reconnaissance capabilities will improve the Mission's capacity to monitor trafficking routes.

Another impediment to the Mission's embargo-monitoring capability is the persistently volatile and unpredictable security situation. Restrictions on movement and limited resources have had a negative impact on the Mission's ability to carry out its inspection mandate. The Panel of Experts has, in the past, cited several examples in which actionable information on major arms trafficking hubs or potential weapons seizures could have been better acted upon by deploying MINUSCA peacekeepers to identified locations.

Lastly, the arms embargo regime is highly politicized in the country. Popular opinion is often manipulated, ignoring the fact that the Committee has never refused an exemption request by the Government and reflecting the view that, while the national authorities are constrained by the embargo, armed groups have unimpeded access to illicit arms.

Additional information on the arms embargo working group

With a view to providing the additional information requested by the Security Council in connection with the recommendation by the Panel of Experts that an arms embargo working group be potentially established within MINUSCA, the paragraphs below describe the possible composition, tasks and functions of such a working group and the implications for the Mission's mandate. In line with the request of the Council, additional information provided draws on the lessons learned and best practices of mechanisms established within other peacekeeping missions to support the implementation of arms embargoes.

An arms embargo working group, including staff from various sections in MINUSCA, could be responsible for coordinating the Mission's efforts in the implementation of its embargo responsibilities and assisting the national authorities in this regard. As the Panel of Experts has no permanent presence in the country, the working group could also provide the Mission with a forum in which to share information with the Panel, advise on required action and engage in channelling capacity-building assistance to the relevant national institutions and agencies crucial to the implementation of the embargo, and with a view to having those institutions and agencies progressively assume more responsibility in the monitoring of the embargo within the context of the broader security sector reform.

The specific tasks of such a working group could include:

(a) Planning, organizing and coordinating monitoring responsibilities and actions: identify key arms and ammunition trafficking routes and entry points, which may include M'Poko International Airport, the port of Bangui, Béma (along the Ubangi River), Am Dafok (on the border with the Sudan) and Tisi (close to the border with Chad), and, as appropriate, provide advice on follow-up action, including inspections, seizures and disposal of weapons and ammunition by the Mission;

(b) Collecting and managing information: gather, analyse and disseminate information on key arms and ammunition trafficking routes and entry points that have been identified; share information with the Panel of Experts; enhance cooperation with relevant government entities and agencies; and share arms-related information with other relevant peacekeeping missions and United Nations expert panels;

(c) Reporting: report to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic on

action taken with respect to the inspection, seizure and disposal of arms and ammunition that are in violation of the embargo;

(d) Providing training and information: promote awareness of the arms embargo and of the respective roles of the embargo working group and the Panel of Experts; develop standard operating procedures for the collection of embargo-related information; organize training of MINUSCA staff, both military and civilian, and of national security forces so as to enhance the collection and compilation of embargo-related information at the field level; and support the national authorities in the development of exemption requests.

The effective functioning of the working group would require increasing the resources of the Mission to perform this coordination function through the inclusion of two additional arms experts that would only be considered for the 2018/19 budget period.

Observations

On the basis of the above, the Mission's current information-gathering and coordination mechanisms could be strengthened, within existing resources, to monitor the implementation of the arms embargo without the need to establish a new structure in the form of a working group.

In this connection, early in April 2017, MINUSCA launched monthly meetings to ensure that its focal point for the monitoring of the arms embargo was aware of all Mission activities requiring communication with the sanctions committee and the Panel of Experts. That forum could be responsible for coordinating the collection, analysis and management of all information pertaining to the arms embargo and ensuring a single channel of communication with the military and police components responsible for taking action with respect to inspections and seizures. It could be formally constituted within the Mission, including by developing appropriate terms of reference.

Among the tasks that the forum could undertake would be the development of standard operating procedures for the collection of embargo-related information, such as a standard arms intake form to document arms seizures, for use by the military and police components. The forum could also coordinate the training of rotating mission personnel, including military and police personnel, on the proper conduct of embargo inspections.

There is a clear correlation between the Mission's efforts to enforce the arms embargo and its strategic objective to support the creation of conditions conducive to the sustainable reduction of the presence of, and threat posed by, armed groups. Every arms seizure and every weapons-trafficking operation that is dismantled helps to weaken armed groups, including their ability to prey on the population and control natural resources, and facilitates the Mission's efforts to exercise its core mandate to protect civilians, restore security and extend State authority. MINUSCA will, therefore, continue to make every effort to ensure that its information-gathering and coordination mechanisms strengthen the Mission's overall capacity to monitor the implementation of the arms embargo, including through inspections and seizures.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**

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Letter dated 11 July 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

We have the honour to refer to a letter from the Russian Federation to the Secretary-General, dated 10 May 2017 (A/71/910-S/2017/415), enclosing a document entitled "The White Helmets: fact or fiction", which contained a number of false, misleading and inaccurate allegations against the Syria Civil Defence, also known as the White Helmets.

The Syria Civil Defence is an impartial and neutral humanitarian group of nearly 3,000 volunteers. They risk their lives every day to save the lives of others by rushing to the scene of attacks to rescue people and to minimize further injury to people and damage to property — they are first responders where there are none. The White Helmets also help to deliver essential public services to the struggling civilian population whom others cannot reach. They bear witness to the systematic human rights violations and possible war crimes perpetrated by the Syrian authorities.

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic has reported extensively that the Syrian authorities and allied forces attack civilians and civilian facilities, including hospitals and schools, and, more broadly, show a disregard for civilian life and international law. As the Syrian armed forces' aerial attacks have increased over the duration of the conflict, the need for first responders to attend the scene of attacks and rescue victims in the aftermath has become essential. To date, 191 Syrian Civil Defence volunteers have been killed while providing assistance to civilians and more than 500 have sustained life-changing injuries. Many of those casualties have been caused through strikes on Syria Civil Defence facilities and the now infamous "follow-on strikes", in which aircraft conduct a second attack as soon as rescue operations begin — a tactic documented by the Commission of Inquiry that seems specifically designed to target emergency workers.

As donors to and supporters of the Syria Civil Defence, our sole interest is in training and equipping these brave volunteers to save civilian lives. The results and recognition of the White Helmets' work are well known, as illustrated by an Oscar Award-winning Netflix documentary, a 2016 Right Livelihood Award and a 2016 Franco-German Prize for Human Rights, which show the concrete work that they do and provide direct evidence contradicting these groundless claims against their

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action. As a matter of best practice we constantly review our support of any project implementer in Syria. Where problems are identified, they are investigated and appropriate action is taken.

We would appreciate your circulating the present letter as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Marc-André **Blanchard**
Permanent Representative of Canada

(*Signed*) Ib **Petersen**
Permanent Representative of Denmark

(*Signed*) François **Delattre**
Permanent Representative of France

(*Signed*) Harald **Braun**
Permanent Representative of Germany

(*Signed*) Karel Jan Gustaaf **van Oosterom**
Permanent Representative of the Netherlands

(*Signed*) Gerard **van Bohemen**
Permanent Representative of New Zealand

(*Signed*) Matthew **Rycroft**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

(*Signed*) Nikki R. **Haley**
Permanent Representative of the United States of America